

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 26-3



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HOOK 2021, September 9-11
Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting
Nugget Casino, Sparks, NV

Fall 2020

<http://skyhawk.org>



THE PREZ SEZ

By Steve "Dwarf" Linder

Greetings Skyhawk Association Members

Final Message

Well, Skyhawk members, my time is up as your president. This is my final Prez Sez column (I know you all are really sad). It's been great to be your leader since September 2018. This is a wonderful organization for all of us because of this magazine, our camaraderie, and our reunions where we can all be together again. I will remain on the board of directors and continue to advocate for the good of the Skyhawk Association. I leave you in the capable hands of the distinguished George "Woodpecker" Blosser for the next two years. Congratulations, George, I know you will do a great job.

Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting 2021

Because of the Tailhook 2020 cancelation, our annual meeting and luncheon, scheduled for 11 September 2020, was canceled.

The good news is that our speaker and guest of honor, former POW and motivational speaker, Captain Charlie Plumb, has penciled us in for Tailhook 2021. So, mark your calendars for our next annual meeting on 10 September 2021. We are excited to hear Captain Plumb and hope the pandemic has abated by then (<https://charlieplumb.com/>).

Skyhawk Association Annual Board Meeting

Because of the Tailhook cancelation, our annual meeting and luncheon, scheduled for 11 September, has also been canceled. We had former POW and motivational speaker, Captain Charlie Plumb, set to be our speaker and guest of honor. We were excited to hear Captain Plumb and hope we can arrange his appearance for Hook '21 (<https://charlieplumb.com/>).

Skyhawk Association Board Meeting

The semi-annual meeting of your board of directors took place virtually (via Zoom) on Friday, 11 September 2020, as planned. We have 759 members, 45 A-4s still flying around the world, and a solid balance sheet moving into 2021.



Steve "Dwarf" Linder

Naval Air Warfighting Development Center (NAWDC)

Director Pete Cole has been contacted by Captain Steven Hejmanowski ("Sonic") at NAWDC at NAS Fallon, NV. Sonic has requested pictures and information from the Skyhawk Association to populate an area dedicated to the history of carrier aviation, in general, and the A-4 Skyhawk in particular. The purpose of this area is to teach the young Naval Aviators about how it was in the "old days" and how the Skyhawk was an important part of that history.

Director Todd Frommelt has contacted Shar Marsh (daughter of aviation artist R.G. Smith) to ask for a donation of artwork. Shar has graciously agreed to donate pictures of many vintage aircraft, especially pre-WWII and WWII combat planes. Many thanks to Shar for her continuing goodwill toward the Navy/Marine Corps aviation communities.

SDOs

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 Terry Wolf, SDO coordinator (tairwolf@comcast.net). For Marine and international units, please contact Bill Egen (bill.egen123@gmail.com).

Reminder

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

Thanks to our editorial staff lead by Bob "Raven" Hickerson for all their efforts in putting together this issue of the A-4Ever. Dave "Hide" Dollarhide is Co-Editor, and Gene "Blade" Atwell is the Webmaster. Thanks, also to Stephanie Davis for her graphics expertise and dedication to the Skyhawk Association. 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.

A-4s Forever!
Dwarf sends



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

• Fall 2020 •

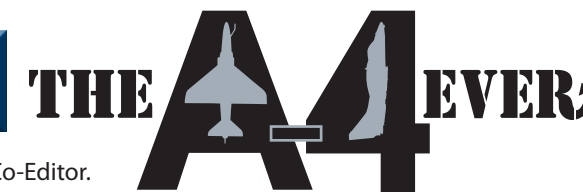
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Gene "Blade" Atwell – Webmaster.

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Contributions

We actively seek contributions from members, including news, photos, historical documents, anecdotes and other items of interest. Submissions may be edited due to space limitations in the newsletter. Contributions may be emailed to the Journal Editor at sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

Stephanie Davis, graphics, skyhawk@ncflight.com. Printed by Acculink, Greenville, NC.

On the Cover: VC-12 Cecil 1982 TA-4 158092 158098 ACM det w VA-203.
Photo by Dave Dollarhide.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org

■ VX-5 LCDR Bennett Hooks

From: Bennett W. Hooks Jr.

My Father who crashed in an A-4D in October 1956 near China Lake was a Lieutenant Commander, not Lieutenant as listed in your records. He received his advancement papers on his desk at the same time of the accident. Since he didn't have a chance to sign his advancement papers to Lieutenant Commander, it took a few months following his death before the record was corrected. While I was only 8 years old at the time, I can still remember how excited he was to fly the A-4D. I have always carried great pride knowing my father was instrumental in testing the A-4D.

Reply From: Gary Verver:

I've made the changes from LT To LCDR. On the VX-5 page. I've heard several different accounts of the accident from different people who were there at the time, but 50 year old memories can be a bit sketchy... as I know all too well myself.

■ Loss of Jim Verdi

From: Brian Bowers

Greetings. Not sure if you are still tracking A-4 pilot losses. I wanted to bring this up in case you were and did not have this particular one listed.

First some background. I always wanted to fly. My dad was a P-51 pilot in the 354th "Pioneer Mustangs" group during WWII. So I grew up in his shadow and, even though he rarely talked about his time in the war as a pilot and POW, I always kept the thought of flying in the recess of my mind. Well, my grades were lacking for college, so I enlisted in the Navy and subsequently became an AT for VA-127 at Lemoore. I was there from the fall of 1970 to 1974. In that time I served as a ground support operator, plane captain and avionics tech.

Sorry if I'm rambling, but it feels good to get this out. Anyway, it wasn't long before I got my back seat checkout card and many of the squadron IPs knew I

loved to fly, so I went airborne in the back seat of TA-4Fs and Js whenever I could. All in all, I had over 100 hours as a "back-seater" over the course of my 3 years with VA-127. Highlights were getting "stick-time" on the way to Fallon or riding along on "road recce's" and bombing hops during training missions. Lots of memories of those flights.

But one of my saddest memories was of the late Lt Jim Verde. He was an IP with VA-127. Quiet and mild mannered was a good way to describe him. I flew in the back seat with him a couple of times, the most memorable being a night in-flight refueling training exercise with another squadron A-4 with a buddy store. If my memory serves me well it was in the summer of 1972 when Lt Verde was lost in a training accident. The thing that hit me hard about this was that he went out of his way to introduce me to his wife and 2 kids at an NAS Lemoore open house just a month or two earlier. It was determined that his aircraft (I think he was in the back seat with a student in the front) flew into ground up in Kings Canyon during a training mission. I will admit that it was hard for me to take that one in.

Reply From: Gary Verver

Thanks Brian, we do know about the loss of Lt. Jim Verdi but don't have any information about the student pilot.

"Lt. James R. Verdi, 30, IP, and an unidentified student pilot from NAS Lemoore were killed August 25 while on a routine training flight. Lt. Verdi had served as flight instructor of six years, four years at Lemoore and the previous two in FL. His plane crashed about 90 miles north of the base and the bodies were recovered Thursday (26th) and apparently neither was able to eject." The Daily Journal, Monday, August, 30, 1971.

"The instructor and student manned a TA-4J for a day instrument training flight. Departure was normal and they arrived at the designated training area which was over mountainous terrain. Once in the area no further communications were

heard. About 45 minutes after departure two forest rangers saw a Navy jet in the dirty configuration flying straight and level up a valley. They watched for about ten seconds until it passed out of view and the engine sound suddenly stopped. About the same time a forest fire lookout reported smoke and a possible forest fire. It turned out to be the crash site of the TA-4J below a ridge line at 8,000 feet. Evidence indicated the TA-4J was in level flight and the port wing hit a tree moments before it hit the ridge. Although a last minute ejection was attempted, time and distance precluded successful completion prior to impact." NAN, Pettibone, March 1973.

■ Approach Power Compensator (APC)

From: Allan Cartwright

Recently I picked up my A-4B/C NATOPS manual (15 July 1969) and found a very interesting section. It's in Section 1, Part 2, page 1-12A. The title is "Approach Power Compensator."

The overview reads, "The approach power compensatory (APC) system is installed in aircraft reworked per A-4 AFC 268. The APC controls the fuel control and is designed to maintain the optimum angle-of-attack of 17.5 units resulting in an optimum approach speed on the glide slope and during maneuvers in the landing pattern at any gross weight. Major APC components are: the computer, amplifier, servo actuator, accelerometer, elevator potentiometer, angle-of-attack vane transducer, and the APC control panel."

This certainly sounds like the A-4 could have had the ability to make auto-power approaches had AFC 268 been installed. The NATOPS manual does not show the APC control panel. I don't remember ever being told of such a system in any of the A-4s I flew (B,C,E,F and T). Were any A-4s ever equipped with this? It might make for a good "What's This" question.

Reply From: Dave Dollarhide

We had APC in our Limas (upgraded Charlie's) in the early seventies. In my mind, it was mostly a novelty to play with and could get you into a dangerous situation at the boat.

Why not? I thought as we hit the break

on a day CARQUAL aboard Lexington. I was the first guy in the pattern and flipped the switch as I approached a tight turn off the base. The throttle began working to hold the optimum AOA, but as I began the turn it retarded to "APC idle," which was not enough to slow my speed normally. I left it engaged, thinking it would catch up and allowed myself to be suckered into an idle all the way trap. Paddles didn't say a word and took me aboard. The problem was that the APC would over compensate for the bank angle, so I quit using it. The other problem was I used it without any FCLP practice. Duh! We had no restrictions either way. The bottom line from my perspective was it was a waste, about as useful as the ASN 91 nav "computer."

■ Lt Col Richard P Spreier

From: Richard Spreier

My father Lt Col Richard P Spreier Passed away in June of last year. He was a member of the Skyhawk Association. I have been reviewing his log books and he had quite a few hours in the A-4 including a tour in Vietnam in 1965-66. He also flew just about every plane in the USMC inventory. I would like to reach out to your members to find out if anyone has any stories or other info that I could use in a memorial service we are planning this year. My mom is getting on in years and doesn't remember very many exact details of my dad's service. I know it's a lot to ask, but any help you could be would be greatly appreciated.

Reply From: Bill Egen

I was able to document through your father's membership in the Skyhawk Association that he flew the A-4 in VMA-224, VMA-225, VMA-223, VMA-311, VMA-214 and H&MS-12 based on his membership data which includes his squadrons. However, we have no info using his name in search of the Skyhawk Association web page. We will continue to search for data but if you can give us more info from his DD-214, especially his Vietnam service, we might be able to document other info.

Reply From: Steve Linder

If you have your father's flight log-books, you might be able to glean where/when he was stationed.

Reply From: Richard Spreier

Here is a photo of one page from his log book in 1967, so it looks like he was actually in Vietnam in 66-67. Do you guys have any insight on what the flight codes mean? Or why some of the flights were recorded in red ink? The entries that have squadrons listed list both VMA-223 and VMA-224. I really appreciate you guys taking the time to reach out. It means a lot to my mom and I.

Reply From: Bill Egen

The red means it was a combat mission. (Green ink was used for combat time in the Navy - Ed) Flight code 152 was standard day mission and 352 was standard night mission. 1A1 was non-combat and 1L1 was a test hop. On other pages if you see "Strike" written in, it means he as taking fire and that counts for 2 points toward a Strike/Flight Air Medal award- it took 20 points to earn a strike/flight air medal or 1 mission if it was written up for heroism. I noticed numbers penciled in ending in 200. That is probably his total combat missions at that point. VMA-223 was in country (Chu Lai, Vietnam) Dec 65-Nov 66. VMA-224 was in country Nov 65-May 66 and then again Jul 66-Nov 66.

Reply From: Richard Spreier

Thanks for the information. It definitely makes looking through his paperwork more interesting. I have one other question: I found the attached letter in his paperwork. It says that in lieu of an eleventh air medal he received the silver star. Is it the 3rd highest award for valor or something different for pilots?

I wish I would have seen these things before he died. I would have asked him. I don't think he thought anything he did was a big deal. He was always a very humble man. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you taking the time to look into my Dad's service. If any of you are ever in the Colorado Springs area, I'm buying.

Reply From: Joe Lilley

The silver star on his air medal means he received more than ten of them. The star devices are attached to the ribbon on the medal indicating a number of awards.

■ A-4 Tipover Events

From: Mike "Goose" Fortin via Richard "Tricky" Shipman



During my "shelter in place" time I've been searching out old Navy aircraft pictures and stuff, including the early A-4s. One thing I came across was the design considerations that led to the very long landing gear on all A-4s. This was driven by the need to carry the Mk-7 nuclear bomb which was the first nuke that a tactical carrier plane could manage. The thing was 30.5 inches in diameter! The Mk-28 that was the largest we dealt with was more like 20." Also, the short non-folding wings required very close spacing of the main mounts. These two factors combined to make for a critical tip over angle. That's why you see pictures like this of the early A-4s.

After reading about all that it occurred to me that I had never heard of anyone having this problem when we were flying A-4s. I don't remember even discussing it as a problem or ways to prevent it. I'm pretty sure that there were no changes to the landing gear over the years. During your time with the Safety Office do you recall instances of A-4 drivers getting into this situation? Since the damage was usually light there may not have been reports to the Center, I suppose. Anyway, just wondering.

Reply From: Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

The low turnover angle remained an acceptable problem for the life of the A-4, but for the most part, only aboard ship. It did so due to the reasons stated by Goose. I have several photos of shipboard turnovers (sometimes stated as "tipover") incidents when taking the barricade, or a cross deck pendant off center hit and such, also with high wind and ship roll. *continued...*

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

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LETTERS continued. .

If configured with “double bubble” drop tanks, the usual damage was minor and repaired by replacing the wing tip. The same gear geometry was also the reason non-spoiler A-4s were limited to a 15kt crosswind (*Later models with ground spoilers increased the limit to 25kts. -Ed*)

■ **Subject: VT-24**
From: Doug Andrews

I am wondering if you might tell me why you have so many early to mid-1970s photos and info yet neither of the VT-24 CO's CDR Teeter or CDR Barker has photos or is even mentioned. I heard that Commander Teeter became an Admiral and came back to NAS Chase headquarters as the Base Commander!

I graduated from the old AE A School at NAS Jacksonville, Florida in 1973. In VT-24 I was on the Fuel Crew then a Plane Captain and Final Checker, then went to the AE Shop as an AE/AFCS. now days an AT Rating. Since I also repaired all the lighting systems, I worked the night shift a lot. Also, I was wondering if Lt. Linder was the First Lieutenant during Christmas 1973. Being an AE in VT-24 was the best job I ever had.

Reply From: Dave Dollarhide

Thanks for the comments. We have about 12,000 photos, but throughout the life of the association, they've come to us from many sources. I'm sure you've been to the VT-24 unit page to see we have very little info and don't even show Teeter or Barker as former COs. Can you tell us when they had command of 24? I knew

Gene Teeter from Cecil around 1967, but don't recall which squadron he was in, except that he flew A-4s. (*The VT-24 page has been updated to include Teeter and Barker as CO's - Ed*)

I see on the unit page of our site, that Steve Linder, our present President was in 24. I've copied him on this email so you can make that connection.

Reply From: Steve Linder

Doug, Good to hear from you. Thanks for keeping up with the Skyhawk Association. Yes, I could have been the First Lieutenant on Christmas 1973, as I arrived in Beeville in September 1973, and was assigned to VT-24. I went back to NAS Chase (now a Federal prison) a few years ago and saw the old VT-24 hangar and the base operations building. It's sad to see those facilities not being used.

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



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



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

Bill Doig, Portland, Michigan, 27 Mar 2020
 Francis “Skip” Fumia, Venice, FL, 6 July 2020
 Walter “Gene” Currin, Jacksonville, FL, 12 Aug 2020
 Capt Gonsalo Fabian Britos Venturini,
 Argentine Air Force, 5 Aug 2020
 Cliff McCraw, Laguna Hills, CA, 8 June 2019
 Mike “Bluechip” Ashworth, 12 July 2020
 Fred Maddenwald, 2012

A-4AR Crash in Argentina



Recently, the Skyhawk Association received a message from a civilian pilot in Argentina, Angel Garcia, to advise us of the recent crash of an Argentine Air Force A-4AR Fightinghawk (Skyhawk).

The cause of the accident is unknown. Captain Gonzalo Britos Venturini managed to eject, but was found deceased during the recovery operations. The airplane, C 925, belonged to the 5th Air Brigade based in Villa Reynolds, in the province of San Luis, central Argentina. It had departed from its home base for a training flight.

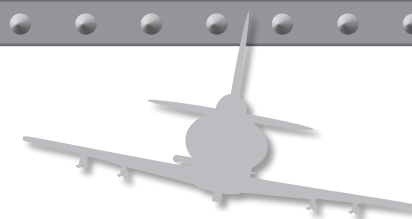
The Air Force issued a statement saying, “We regret to report that after the ejection carried out this morning, the A4AR pilot was found dead in the vicinity of the town of Villa Valeria.”

The A-4AR is a modified US Marine A-4M, with upgrades that include the ESCAPEC 1G3 ejection seat, AN APG-66V2 Radar, color panel displays and hands on throttle and stick controls (HOTAS).

The Skyhawk Association looks forward to any additional information and offers our sincere condolences to Captain Venturini's family and friends.

Read?

you think
we read?



BLOODY SIXTEEN THE USS ORISKANY AND AIR WING 16 DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

Fey, Peter.
 Potomac Books, University of Nebraska Press
 Lincoln, Nebraska
 2018. 393 pp. Ill. \$32.95.

Of all the people and events that characterize the U.S. military experience in Vietnam, especially that of U.S. Naval Aviation and its flight crews, one of the most consistently gut-wrenching accounts are the 1960s deployments of the USS *Oriskany* (CVA-34) and its air wing, CVW-16. Even today, nearly 60 years later, those members of this fabled ship, air wing and its story evoke such strong memories that, truth be told, it is difficult for the veterans, many now in their 80s, have trouble talking about their experiences, the missions, their shipmates and, of course, the catastrophic fire that occurred on October 26, 1966, when so many of the ship's company and air wing lost their lives under terrible circumstances that can only be described in one word: horrific.

Anyone who has written about Naval Aviation during the Vietnam War, myself included, cannot forget “Bloody Sixteen,” and the memories stamped on brains that will never forget them. This well-researched and detailed account of the *Oriskany*'s 1965, 1966 and 1967 deployments begins with an equally well-thought-out introductory chapter with sections dealing with specific subjects such as what it took to fight a war in Southeast Asia (SEA) that the U.S. was unprepared for, various weapons and training, including particular aircraft types. There is also a political synopsis as background of the war that is one of the best such descriptions I have seen, along with descriptions of North Vietnamese defenses against the growing U.S. campaign that developed into Rolling Thunder, the major bombing campaign against North Vietnam's

facilities that supported their war against America.

Peter Fey is a retired commander EA-6B Prowler ECMO (electronic countermeasures officer) with considerable flight experience in other aircraft and is thus well-qualified to write this major work. His discussion of early events including the first MiG kills and creation of Dixie Station and Yankee Station as the war evolved and the need for carriers and their air wings became more acute is also worthy of note. His book soon becomes a fine overall history of the Vietnam air war but he never loses focus of his treatment



At six feet, six inches, LCDR Denis Weichman of VA-164 barely fit into the A-4's cockpit. He flew 625 missions in four different aircraft. (Courtesy of Mrs. Wanda Weichman).

of the main subject of the experiences of the *Oriskany* and her brave, dedicated air wing and all who served in her.

Fey describes how devastating the 1965 deployments were and the carriers

and their squadron members. He mentions then-Lt. Bud Flagg, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate who flew Crusaders with VF-162 over North Vietnam and who had asked and received permission from “Peanuts” creator, Charles Schultz to use the “Snoopy” character in a squadron symbol. In Fey's opinion, his move to increase squadron morale met with criticism from many aviators contesting the terrible losses is an interesting variation of the well-known story contrasts with what seems to be the popularity of the mascot on the vertical tails of the Hunter F-8Es.

Flagg logged more than 3,000 hours in the Crusader, served many years in the Navy, eventually rising to two-star rank in the reserves as the high-time Crusader driver in both the F-8 and RF-8G, and squadron CO of VFP-206. He and his wife Dee were on American Flight 77 when 9/11 terrorists flew their heavily-loaded airliner into the Pentagon.

After describing how devastating the 1965 deployment was for the carrier and its air wing squadrons—the air wing commander, James Stockdale had been shot down and captured on September 9th, and several pilots and their aircraft had been also been lost—he also writes about early MiG encounters, and goes on to describe the next two “O boat” deployments in 1966 and 1967. If there had been any thought that these succeeding cruises might have been easier, those hopes were soon dashed as losses continued, punctuated by the huge fire on October 26, 1966, when more than 100 air wing aviators and ship's company because of poor handling of flares by junior ship's company sailors, and lack of personal breathing apparatus and exit passages that saw many air wing officers trapped in their staterooms or in passageways outside their spaces.

There was also a growing shortage of ordnance, especially bombs, and Air Wing 16's sorties were marked by launching aircraft with improper bombloads that often included very old bombs from Air Force sources from the Korean War of 1950-1953.

continued...

The *Oriskany* early in the war (perhaps 1965) with all her air wing aboard. SPADS after-deck, with A-4s and F-8s midships and forward by the bow catapults. (U.S. Navy)



Chapter 8, The Battle Increases, begins with a brief discussion of the effects of the intense POL campaign and the introduction of SA-2 SAMs, which allows former ECMO Fey to display his professional knowledge of ECM and its initial effect on the air war. It was also the time of growth of the enemy's defenses that saw increases in SAM and AAA batteries along the ingress and egress routes that became too well-known by the North Vietnamese ground crews who learned how to pinpoint their targets with growing accuracy.



VA-164 A-4Es outbound to target with a maximum bomb load, including Mk 84 2,000 pounders. AH 407 (151180) in the foreground was then the current squadron mascot "Lady Jessie" for the 1968 cruise. (U.S. Navy)

Growing dissent in the Pentagon as the generals and admirals grew increasingly combative against Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, a holdover from the previous Kennedy administration and a source of great distrust and misunderstanding as to how the conduct of the war should continue, certainly shows how and why the conflict was not proceeding as planned. In turn, SecDef McNamara made no secret of his mounting feelings about what he felt were his forces' disability in winning the war. I must say, the entire situation reminds me of Adolf Hitler distrusting his long-time associate and former fighter pilot and ace Hermann Goering, head of the Luftwaffe, after the unsuccessful sequence of the Battle of Britain in the Fall of 1940 which prevented the Nazi dictator's ultimate plan to invade and conquer the stubborn island nation.

North Vietnamese MiGs began making limited appearances during the 1965 cruise. Lt Flagg had caught sight of one but couldn't get into an engagement with the MiG-17, whose pilot disappeared in a cloud and escaped further attention from the young American Crusader pilot. By the 1966 deployment, however, MiG activity had increased and now the aging little MiG-17's threat was augmented by the world-class MiG-21 that was fast and maneuverable. North Korean "volunteers," often flew Vietnamese MiG-17s and, according to some unofficial sources occasionally their own MiG-21s.

The *Oriskany*'s VF-162 F-8Es engaged several MiGs and often received as good as they got. On 14 July, the Hunters CO, the colorful Cdr. Dick Bellinger found himself the target of a dedicated MiG-17 pilot as they skipped over the rooftops of houses at high speed. The MiG's three heavy cannon finally did their job and Bellinger had to eject 40 miles from Da Nang to be rescued by an Air Force helicopter. Two months later, on 9 October, the VF-162 skipper returned the compliment and bagged the first MiG-21 kill by a Navy fighter pilot. Fey describes the growing MiG presence that was beginning to have more meaning for U.S. crews.

Besides the more glamorous MiG engagements, the *Oriskany*'s CVW-16's light-attack A-4 squadrons were in the thick of the fighting and as a result, the air wing's losses were equally terrible with appalling personal injuries, deaths and imprisonments that often resulted in incarceration and inhuman torture that went on for more than five years, the stuff of books, movies and soul-searching inquiries that lasted for years and for which there has yet to be a national remedy, if there will ever be one. Indeed, the numbers of injuries and deaths from American participation in the post-911 conflicts

in SWA find a convenient partner in the memories of Vietnam. Peter Fey ends his book with a 14-page discussion of the experiences of POWs in Vietnam, the men as well as their families who spent years for even the slightest word of their captured loved ones languishing away, some dying, in their cells somewhere in the enemy's cities.

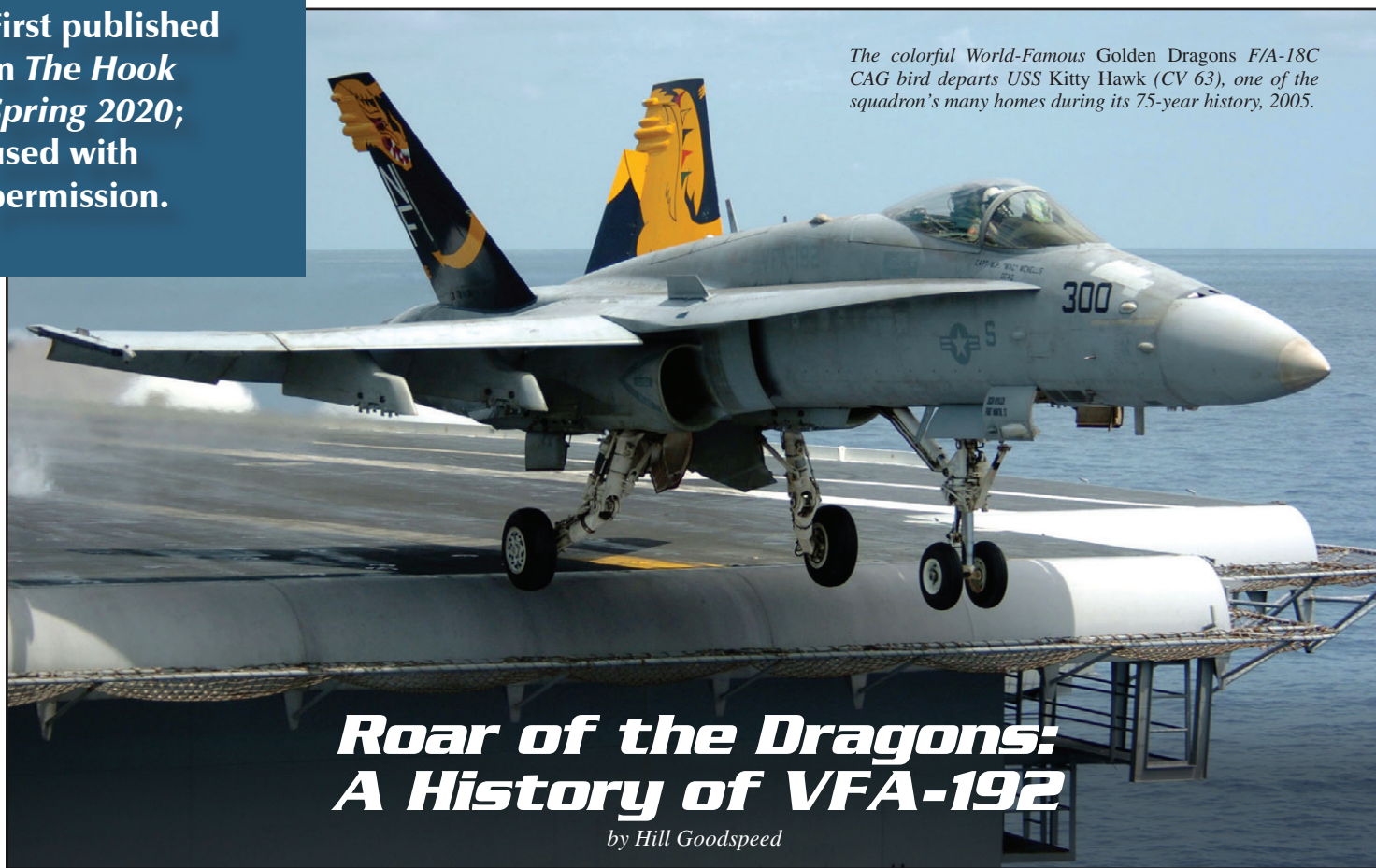
His final chapter "Because Our Fathers Lied" leaves concerned readers wondering at the expense of American experiences in Vietnam, not only in terms of financial expense, but of the lingering personal emotional assessment of that long period in American history, and at the heart of the story is that of the *Oriskany* and its air wing, CVW-16. Highly recommended for veterans of those deployments as well as Americans of all ages and experiences who may still want to know more about that part of the Vietnam War. ✈

Review by Peter Mersky

Commander Mersky is a long-time reviewer of books on American military aviation. He has written a regular column for Naval Aviation News since 1982 and has also written 17 books, most of which dealing with the American experience, especially that of U.S. Navy and Marine Corps flight crews. His magazine articles have appeared in several U.S. aviation publications, including Foundation. He received the 1998 Admiral Arthur Radford Award for excellence in writing about Naval Aviation.

He was commissioned through AOCS in May 1968 and served in several reserve intelligence units as well as two tours with VFP-306, the Navy's penultimate RF-8G unit as the squadron's Air Intelligence Officer, retiring with 23 years of active and reserve service. As a civilian, he was a writer then editor of Approach magazine for 16 years before retiring from the Naval Safety Center in 2000 with 32 years combined Federal service.

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permission.



The colorful World-Famous Golden Dragons F/A-18C CAG bird departs USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), one of the squadron's many homes during its 75-year history, 2005.

Roar of the Dragons: A History of VFA-192

by Hill Goodspeed

“I feel very lucky to have been a *Golden Dragon*,” says former VFA-192 skipper and *Blue Angels* flight leader CAPT Ryan “Guido” Bernacchi. “I loved the way we worked together. The reverence for the squadron’s legacy, and the shoulders we stood on, was something very tangible, but more so was the humble pride in being a *Dragon*. It came from being a part of a team that produced quality airplanes, supported each other and worked incredibly hard getting after whatever mission came our way. SSHWFGD!”

The *Golden Dragon* legacy began on 26 March 1945. With America in the midst of its fourth year of war, the Navy established a new fighting squadron at NAS Atlantic City, N.J. In the Western Pacific the Japanese kamikaze attacks had intensified, and VF-153 was destined to combat them and support the planned invasion of the home islands. Leading the new squadron was LCDR Kenneth Hance, who wore the Distinguished Flying Cross for his role in sinking a German U-boat earlier in the war, while Naval Academy graduate LCDR George McFetridge served as executive officer. VF-153 was McFetridge’s first flying billet, but his service as a blackshoe had taken him aboard three flattops in campaigns from Midway to Tarawa, including swimming away from USS *Hornet* (CV 8) when she was sunk off Guadalcanal.

Flying operations began almost immediately in F6F-3/5 *Hellcats*. The weeks were filled with firing runs against towed target sleeves, honing ground attack skills using practice bombs and rockets and carrier qualification on board USS *Charger* (CVE 30). “With all its training completed the squadron was well prepared for any assignment in the combat area,” the war diary noted, but events changed the squadron’s course. “Due to the abrupt cessation of hostilities, VF-153 remained untried in combat but confident it could take any mission assigned to it.” The surrender of Japan and the end of World War II took place before the squadron’s insignia, a kangaroo wearing boxing gloves and holding rockets and machine gun bullets in its tail and pouch, received approval.

Naval Aviation’s drawdown from wartime levels proved arbitrary when it came to combat legacy, and VF-153 survived while other units that flew in the great air battles of the Pacific War faded into history. In August 1946 the squadron shifted to the West Coast, making NAS Alameda, Calif., its new home. The following November, a new system changed its designation to VF-15A, and personnel proposed a new

insignia featuring a knight’s helmet atop a shield. It remained in use when VF-15A redesignated to VF-151 on 15 July 1948.

During this period the squadron began operating the F8F *Bearcat*, a diminutive fighter built around a powerful Pratt & Whitney 2,100-hp engine, prompting many an aviator to comment that you strapped on a *Bearcat* rather than climbing into the cockpit. The squadron made its first cruise on board USS *Antietam* (CV 36) in *Hellcats*, embarking as VF-151 on a subsequent cruise in *Bearcats* as part of *Carrier Air Group Nineteen* (CVG-19) on board USS *Boxer* (CV 21) in January 1950. While at sea, VF-151’s designation again changed to VF-192. The squadron returned from the Far East deployment on 13 June 1950.

National Naval Aviation Museum



Flight-deck personnel wait to pull chocks on a VF-151 F8F-1 Bearcat before a deck launch from USS Tarawa (CV 40), 1948.

Just 12 days later the attack by North Korean forces across the 38th parallel into South Korea changed the fortunes of the squadron. Exchanging the *Bearcats* for F4U-4 *Corsairs*, squadron pilots prepared for a quick turn-around that would take them and the other squadrons of CVG-19 to the Western Pacific on board USS *Princeton* (CV 37). They also adopted a new insignia, a puffing dragon superimposed over the bow of an aircraft carrier.

By 5 December 1950, VF-192 aircraft were flying combat missions over the snowy landscape of the Chosin Reservoir in support of U.S. troops confronting an onslaught of Chinese forces that had crossed the Yalu River. They were joined in this effort by the F9F *Panthers* of the *Princeton*-based VF-191 *Satan’s Kittens*, whose cadre of pilots consisted of members of the *Blue Angels*, the flight demonstration team having been disbanded for Korean War service. The pace of these initial operations was intense. An action report detailing CVG-19’s close-air-support missions on 21–22 December alone included 30 flights ranging in size from two to nine aircraft. VF-192 *Corsairs* napalmed, bombed and strafed an array of targets including supply carts, fuel drums, train cars, structures and enemy troops. One day saw *Princeton* aircraft make 592 runs on targets. Weather did not deter their dedication to supporting the troops on the ground. On one mission VF-192 pilots descended through overcast on instruments to find a clearance of only a few hundred feet below the fog in the attack area. Despite the increased threat of enemy fire at this altitude, the *Corsairs* remained in the area providing close air support for as long as their fuel supply allowed.

A notable mission for the squadron came on 1 May 1951, when it supported the torpedo attack carried out against the Hwacheon Dam by AD *Skyraiders* off *Princeton*. Eight VF-192 F4U-4s joined four from sister squadron VF-193 as fighter escort and flak suppressors for the landmark strike led by CAG CDR Richard C. Merrick, who was killed in action 17 days later. By the time the cruise concluded, VF-192 had suffered its share of losses with six aircraft shot down and the loss of three pilots.



VF-192 pilots smile for the camera from the cockpits of their F4U-4 Corsairs on board *Princeton* during Korean War combat operations, 1950–’51.

National Naval Aviation Museum

A VF-192 F4U-4 launches from USS *Princeton* (CV 37) for a close-air-support mission over Korea, 1950.



The squadron left their aircraft behind as *Princeton* remained in the Far East. Returning to the United States, VF-192 caught up with the jet age, or so it seemed, as the squadron accepted F9F-2 *Panthers* and made ready to operate from a new home in the shadows of the mammoth blimp hangars at NAS Moffett Field, Calif. However after just weeks, the squadron transferred its allotment of jets to VF-191 and returned to F4U cockpits for a second deployment off Korea.

Missions for the squadron included interdiction against the enemy transportation network, including at night to complement the pilots of VC-3. The relatively static nature of the front lines decreased the requirements for close air support that had been prevalent on the previous cruise. *Princeton's* action report also noted, "More and more, the major effort shifted to targets of a strategic nature: power plants, mining activities, factories..." VF-192 pilots were therefore part of some of the largest air strikes of the war, including Joint operations with USAF aircraft. Statistics for a 28 July 1952, attack against the Kilchu magnesite plant and associated facilities reveal the scope of the effort, with 38 CVG-19 aircraft in two strike groups unleashing 40 tons of bombs on the targets.

The intense pace of operations and enemy defenses took their toll. In one month alone, 16 air group aircraft were lost or damaged in mishaps or combat action. Two VF-192 pilots had contrasting experiences. LCDR Gervase Struegel lost two aircraft during the cruise, on one occasion bailing out after suffering an engine failure during a bombing run and on another ditching when the engine failed while on approach for recovery on board *Princeton*. Squadron skipper CDR Elwin A. "Ace" Parker, who

National Naval Aviation Museum



With dragons adorning their noses, VF-192 F9F-5s await the signal to taxi forward on board USS Oriskany (CVA 34). Squadron Panthers starred in "The Bridges at Toko-Ri."

served as squadron executive officer on the 1951 cruise, reached his 100th combat mission and 300 combat hours during the 1952 deployment, also logging the 18,000th landing on board *Princeton*. He did so, recounted an article in *Naval Aviation News*, "without ever sustaining as much as a small bullet hole in his plane."

The second time proved the charm for VF-192 when transitioning to jets. The squadron flew F9F-2s briefly after returning home before receiving the F9F-5, which it took to sea on board USS *Oriskany* (CVA 34) for the first of two cruises that began just weeks after the armistice ended hostilities in Korea. Once again assigned to CVG-19, which was under the command of CDR James "Jig Dog" Ramage, VF-192 had a notable first cruise in jets. During one 12-day period, pilots flew their *Panthers* ashore to Johnson AB outside Tokyo to experience the life lived by their counterparts in the 40th Fighter Interceptor Squadron. With dragons painted prominently on the noses of their aircraft, VF-192 pilots took their turn standing alerts from before sunrise to after sunset, practicing getting to their planes in just three minutes at the sound of the alarm and launching in 90 seconds. The squadron made a number of practice intercepts before returning to the more familiar spaces of a flattop at sea.

This period also included a taste of Hollywood life as squadron personnel supported the filming of "Men of the Fighting Lady" and "The Bridges at Toko-Ri." The unit's aircraft figured prominently in the latter, visible in brilliant color for the carrier and aerial sequences depicting William Holden and his squadron flying combat missions in the Korean War.



Among the aircraft flown by the Golden Dragons after redesignation as VA-192 was the FJ-4B Fury, pictured soaring over Mt. Fuji in 1959.

The conclusion of the 1955 deployment on board *Oriskany* brought yet another change. On 15 March 1956, after more than a decade of service as a fighter squadron, VF-192 became VA-192. Its new identity as an attack squadron coincided with the adoption of the nickname *Golden Dragons*. A new insignia featured a more ferocious dragon, the inclusion of an atomic symbol and mushroom cloud representing the squadron's special weapons delivery capability flying new F9F-6 *Cougars*. The first and only cruise in the *Cougar* came on board the venerable *Fighting Lady*, USS *Yorktown* (CVA 10), followed by transition to the FJ-4B *Fury* and the beginning of a string of six deployments on board USS *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA 31).

On 1 July 1959, in a unique reorganization, the *Golden Dragons* exchanged aircraft and personnel, including commanding officers, with the VA-216 *Black Diamonds*. VA-192's new mount was the A4D-2 *Skyhawk*, with the squadron making its first deployment in the type in 1959-1960 on board *Bonnie Dick*, accepting the all-weather A4D-2N upon return from a Western Pacific (WESTPAC) deployment. On 1 January 1962, the Imperial Valley beckoned and VA-192 shifted its operations from NAS Moffett Field to the Navy's newest Master Jet Base, NAS Lemoore. In the ensuing years, *Skyhawks* emblazoned with the insignias of many Navy A-4 squadrons departed Lemoore's runways bound for combat over Vietnam. The deadly skies claimed more *Skyhawks* than any other aircraft in the Navy's inventory.

Following a quick work-up cycle after returning from a 10-month deployment to the Indian Ocean and WESTPAC, the *Golden Dragons* headed to war in April 1965. This first cruise coincided with the inauguration of the interdiction campaign over North Vietnam called *Operation Rolling Thunder*. The squadron's



Tailhook collection



A-4C Skyhawks of VA-192 fly in formation during work ups prior to the Golden Dragons' first Vietnam War cruise, Jan 1965.



The charred battle-damaged A-4E Skyhawk that LCDR Mike Estocin managed to fly back to USS Ticonderoga (CVA 14) on 20 Apr '67, one of the heroic actions for which he received the Medal of Honor.

Skyhawks logged 5,783 flight hours, flew more than 2,800 combat missions and delivered over 5 million pounds of ordnance. The return from this cruise marked the end of the squadron's operations from *Bonnie Dick* as CVW-19 shifted to USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA 14) for its 1966-'67 combat cruise, during which VA-192 flew newly acquired A-4Es. The *Golden Dragons* were part of the most intense aerial combat of the war, facing anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles (SAM) defending industrial targets in Hanoi and Haiphong.

To counter the latter threat, A-4Es carrying AGM-45 *Shrike* anti-radiation missiles went in ahead of the strike aircraft in an effort to take out SAM sites, which involved dodging deadly missiles fired at them. This mission was known as *Iron Hand*, and the most aggressive pilot carrying it out was VA-192 Operations Officer LCDR Mike Estocin. "Mike was one of the few who enjoyed dueling with SAMs," recalled CDR John B. Nichols, an F-8 *Crusader* pilot who flew escort for these missions. "He was not content to merely suppress the enemy batteries—he wanted to shoot them with *Shrikes*—to go for the 'hard kill' rather than the 'mission kill'."

On a 20 April 1967 mission, Estocin attacked three SAM sites. His jet sustained so much damage that he tanked for some 100 miles until making an arrested landing with his plane on fire and fuel streaming from it. Six days later, with Nichols on his wing, Estocin was targeting a SAM site in advance of a strike against a thermal power plant in Haiphong when the two aviators observed a missile launch. It detonated below Estocin's *Skyhawk*, peppering the nose and cockpit with holes, almost completely destroying the port intake and igniting a fire on the underside of the fuselage. Estocin seemed to regain control of the airplane after it was thrown into an inverted nose down attitude, but when Nichols flew alongside the crippled A-4E as it slowed and descended, he observed Estocin with his head down and not moving. He followed the airplane through some overcast and watched it hit the ground. For his heroic actions on those two days, Estocin received the Medal of Honor posthumously,

Naval History and Heritage Command



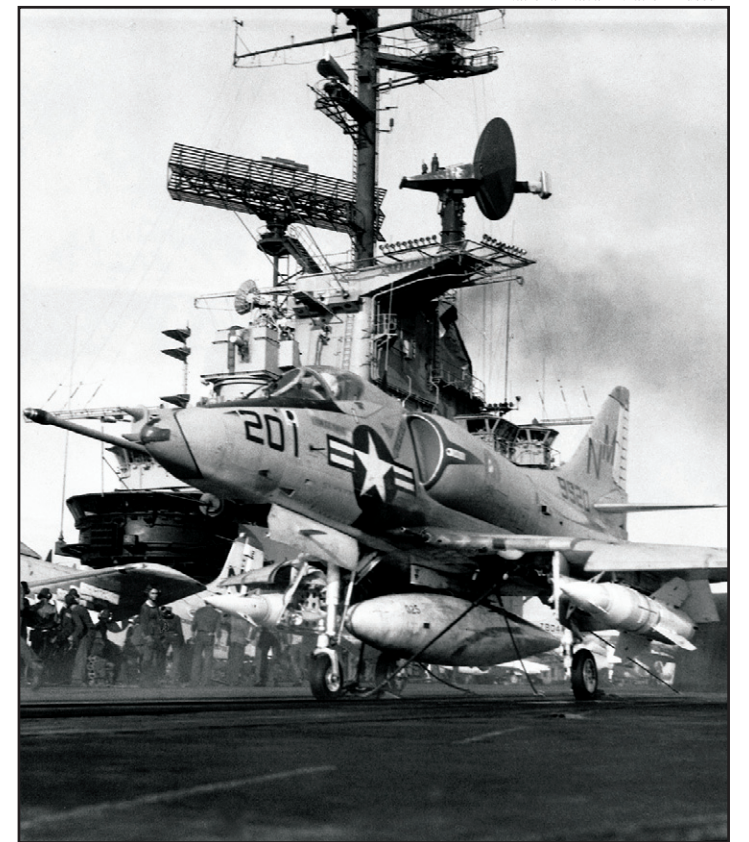
LCDR Mike Estocin

one of only two tailhooker recipients of the nation's highest honor during the Vietnam War. To this day, his widow Marie is on hand each year at the Tailhook Symposium to present the Michael J. Estocin Award to the Navy's top strike fighter squadron.

The other VA-192 pilot shot down that day, LTJG John W. Cain, was in the Alfa strike Estocin was supporting and suffered damage to his *Skyhawk* that filled his cockpit with smoke and knocked out his radio, electronics and hydraulics. While heading toward the Tonkin Gulf, his plane began to roll at an altitude of some 2,000 feet and Cain ejected, landing in the water near the mouth of the Haiphong River just 250 yards off the shore of Do San Island. LT Steve Millikin, later editor of *The Hook*, and his crew in their SH-3A *Sea King* arrived overhead and pulled Cain from the water while under fire from mortars and machine guns.

VA-192 made two more deployments in *Skyhawks*, the last from the squadron's old roost *Oriskany*, before returning to NAS Lemoore in November 1969. The following February the *Golden Dragons*' skipper and executive officer flight delivered the squadron's first A-7E *Corsair II* attack aircraft from the Vought factory in Dallas, some two decades after their predecessors accepted the previous airplane to carry that nickname.

Two cruises followed on board *Kitty Hawk* (CVA 63), marking the first time the squadron had not flown from an *Essex*-class carrier. However, one pilot may have become a bit nostalgic for the old days during the 1970-'71 deployment. The carrier's cruise book notes the late return of one VA-192 pilot from a strike with the traditional graffiti on his plane after landing on board *Hancock* (CVA 19). The squadron history for the cruise noted a new nickname for VA-192, the "Laotian Highway Patrol," with *Golden Dragons* A-7Es accumulating 6,600 flight hours and dropping 15.2 million pounds of ordnance on enemy supply routes day and night in all kinds of weather without the loss of a single airplane. The sixth and final Vietnam combat cruise encompassed 192 days on *Yankee Station* and included support of the intense aerial campaign against North Vietnam called *Operation Linebacker I* and participation in the mining of Haiphong Harbor.



Loaded with AGM-12 Bullpup missiles, a VA-192 A-4 Skyhawk prepares to roar off the cat on a combat mission over North Vietnam.

National Naval Aviation Museum

A-7E Corsair IIs flew the last Vietnam combat missions for VA-192 after replacing the squadron's Skyhawks in 1970.



Returning in late 1972, VA-192 embarked on a 13-year period of regular deployments that took the *Golden Dragons* to WESTPAC, the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea and the coast of Central America, the latter to be ready to respond to political unrest in Nicaragua in the summer of 1983. The squadron operated from *Kitty Hawk*, USS *Ranger* (CV 61) and USS *America* (CV 66), with a stint ashore at MCAS Iwakuni as part of *Marine Aircraft Group 12*.

The year 1986 brought a redesignation to VFA-192 that coincided with acceptance of the F/A-18A *Hornet*. The squadron became part of the forward-deployed CVW-5 operating from the Japan-based USS *Midway* (CV 41). At sea in their new strike fighters, the *Dragons* supported *Operation Earnest Will* in the Persian Gulf, provided a show of force off Seoul, South Korea, during the 1988 Summer Olympics and in the summer of 1990 deployed as part of the large assemblage of naval forces in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The commencement of *Operation Desert Storm* took the *Golden Dragons* into harm's way, with the squadron scribe reporting to *The Hook* that "Mk 83s, *Rockeye* and *HARM* missiles" were unleashed on missions "deep into Iraqi territory," with *Rockeyes* "put on target to disable gunboats and oil platforms." VFA-192 compiled 576 combat sorties and delivered 730,000 pounds of ordnance in the swan song for the F/A-18A, the squadron upgrading to the F/A-18C in August 1991.

National Naval Aviation Museum



VFA-192 began flying its new F/A-18A Hornets, pictured in formation in 1989, as part of the Forward-Deployed Naval Forces, operating initially at sea from USS *Midway* (CV 41).

USN, LT Robert Nordlund



A VFA-192 F/A-18E Rhino flies wing on a USAF B-1B Lancer over the Philippine Sea during Joint operations while on a Western Pacific cruise on board USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), 14 Feb '17.

A decade later the 9/11 terrorist attacks sent the *Golden Dragons* into combat again. The squadron was now operating from the same flight deck from which their Vietnam predecessors had launched when *Kitty Hawk* replaced *Midway* as the forward-deployed carrier in Japan. No-notice mobilizations became the norm, with VFA-192 personnel deploying aboard ship flying interdiction and close-air-support missions over Afghanistan as part of *Operation Enduring Freedom* and also standing alerts on Diego Garcia.

On 12 December 2002, VFA-192 was in the air when the *Hornet* program eclipsed 5 million total flight hours. The squadron added to that total the following year by leading CVW-5 in the number of missions flown in support of *Operation Iraqi Freedom* (OIF), delivering 224,000 pounds of ordnance and launching 283 Joint Direct Attack Munitions and laser-guided bombs on 339 trips over the beach. A department head in the squadron at that time, CAPT Tom Frosch, USN(Ret) recalled that he and LT Chris Smith had the distinction of flying the squadron's first and last combat missions of the cruise. The pair delivered 2,000-lb. bombs on bunkers days before the first large-scale strikes of OIF and made low-level strafing runs supporting troops on the ground to conclude the squadron's time in combat. A future flight leader of the *Blue Angels*, Frosch recalled that walking into the *Golden Dragons* ready room was memorable because of the rich heritage of the squadron from the yellow main gear struts on the squadron's *Hornets* to the yellow socks worn by pilots. "The recipe for success in Naval Aviation is good people and tradition," Frosch said. "In the *Golden Dragons*, we had good Sailors who bought into the traditions of the squadron."

Returning to patrols in the Western Pacific, the squadron made the "last ride" on board *Kitty Hawk* before her return to the United States for decommissioning. VFA-192 also returned stateside in 2009, joining CVW-9 at NAS Lemoore and deploying on board USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74).

Transitioning to the F/A-18E *Super Hornet*, the *Golden Dragons* received their Safe-for-Flight Certification in 2014, with reassignment to CVW-2 operating from USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), where the squadron continues to project power around the globe. Frosch recalled from his time in VFA-192 that "The Bridges at Toko-Ri" was required watching to imbue pilots with the squadron's heritage. The movie played in the ready room en route to OIF. The lines uttered by fictional RADM Tarrant in the book on which the movie is based ring true in describing the Naval Aviators who have served in the SSHWFGD. "They leave this tiny ship and fly against the enemy. Then they must seek the ship, lost somewhere on the sea. And when they find it, they have to land upon its pitching deck. Where did we get such men?"



Cecil Field POW/MIA MEMORIAL & MUSEUM

Progress Report

By Dave Dollarhide

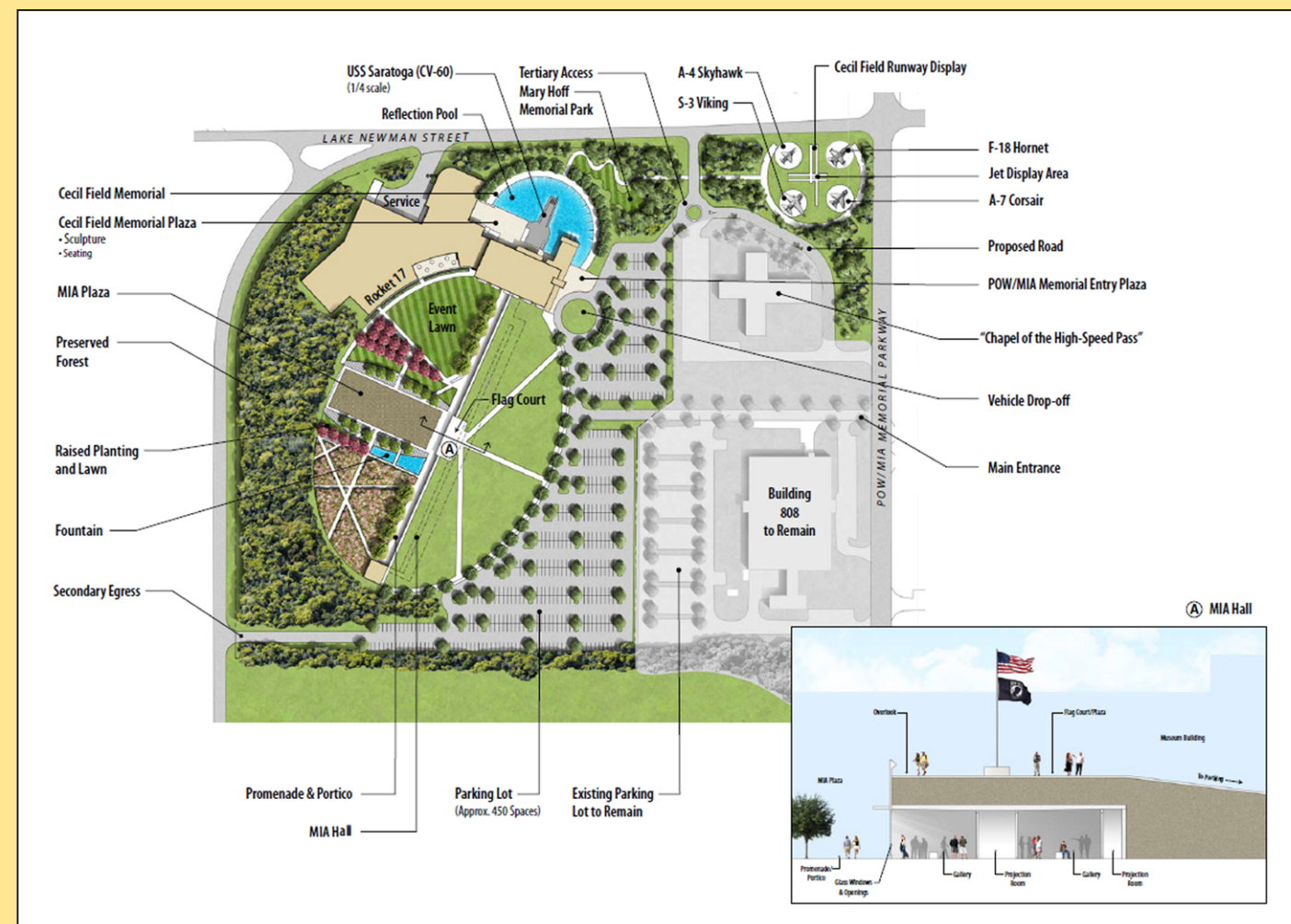
At the former NAS Cecil Field, the up and coming POW/MIA Memorial is making good progress. Acting as the anchor of the planned complex, the former base chapel, now called "The Church of the High Speed Pass," has been completely restored, with the old base theater across the street now being used for meetings and storage.

An A-7A Corsair II has been delivered to Cecil as the first of four display airplanes to sit on concrete pads, now being constructed near the Chapel. An airliner overhaul company at Cecil, *Flight Star*, is donating a new paint job for the A-7. Negotiations with the Airport Director are under way to move an FA-18 from near the airport tower the few blocks to the site and there is a lead on an S-3 Viking. So far, the search for an A-4 Skyhawk has come up short, but there is optimism one will be found.

The overall project has extensive plans for other buildings and surrounding park to pay tribute to POW/MIA's from the US military services, plus a memorial to all lost in the line of duty from NAS Cecil.

There has been great support in Jacksonville and the State of Florida for the cause to date. \$384,546 has been raised towards a goal of \$2,000,000, so there is still a lot to do. The Skyhawk Association has donated \$1,000 and purchased a large brick that will include our logo and a tribute to those lost from Cecil.

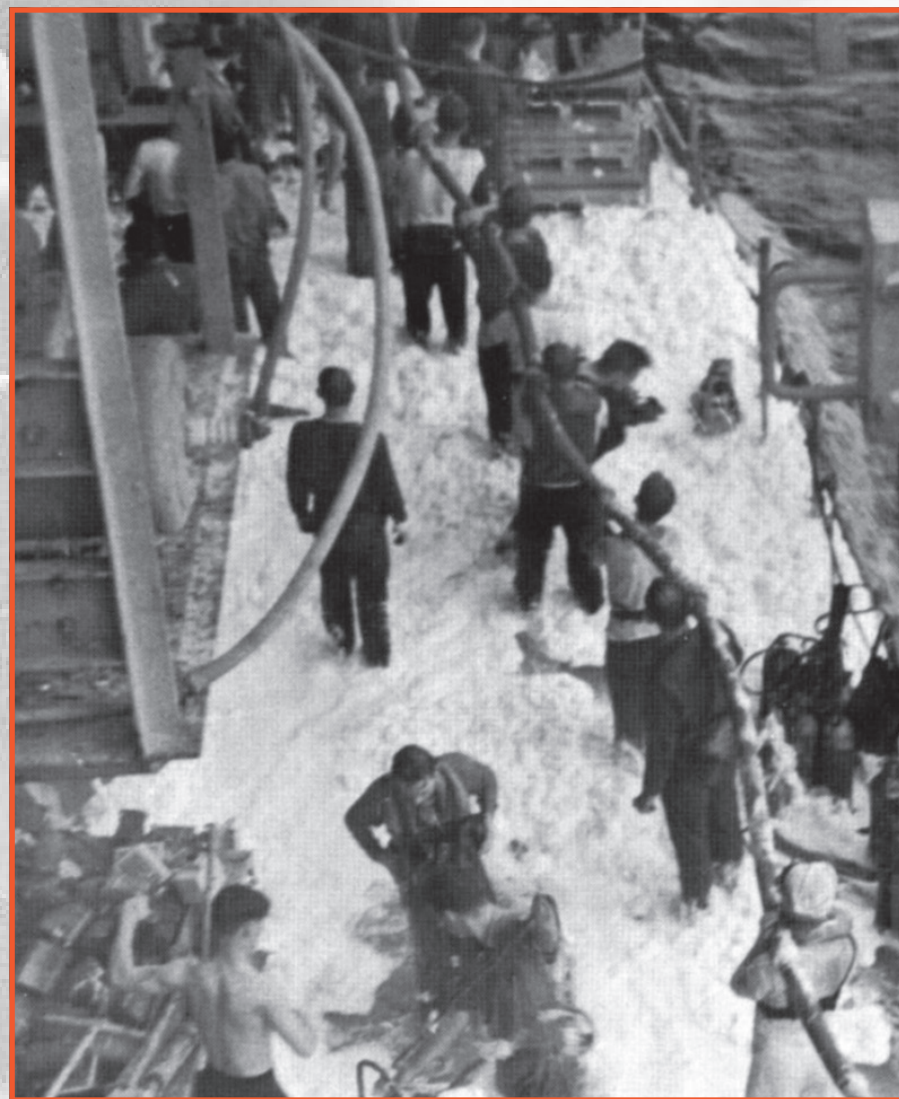
The *Memorial Brick Campaign* and challenge coin sales are helping greatly. I just bought a brick displaying the insignia for my reserve squadron, VA-203, and I encourage all to help this worthy cause by going to <https://www.powmiamemorial.org/support-the-memorial/>



“This is a drill. Fire, Fire....”

October 26, 1966

The USS Oriskany Fire Stories



U.S. Navy sailors fighting the fire aboard the aircraft carrier USS Oriskany (CVA-34) off Vietnam on 26 October 1966. After a sailor accidentally ignited a flare in the forward hangar bay a fire erupted that killed 44 men.

From Ken “Mule” Adams:

As we approached the 50th anniversary of the “O Boat” fire, I wondered if I could also use the upcoming reunion to see if anyone might want to write of their experiences during the fire. Goose Hunter and I had visited Marvelous Marv Reynolds a couple of weeks before he died, and he told us his story of fighting the fire. It was the first time I had heard the story from the horse’s mouth so to speak.

I received several stories which I have put together to hopefully find a proper forum to preserve them. They are similar but different and yet quite amazing. Being on board a ship in trouble is much different than most other situations. Your ship is your floating home, and if she goes under you will too. So all on board no matter what the rank will work together to save her. I know that from my experience on the “Mighty O.” ■

What follows are three of the many stories held by Ken Adams.

“Marvelous” Marv Reynold’s USS Oriskany Story (As told by Ken Adams)

Marv and his roommate heard the 1MC announce the fire, and both knew the fire was in their area. Marv’s roommate was a bit quicker dressing than Marv but unfortunately not quick enough. As he opened the door to the stateroom and entered the passageway, he was hit by the fire front and died as Marv was starting to exit.

Marv then closed the stateroom door and started putting towels and bedding around the door to prevent the smoke from entering the room. As the wall caught fire from the heat Marv used water from the sink to wet down the towels and bedding. His stateroom had a port hole that had been locked for some time. He used his shoe to finally break the seal and open the port hole. He then stuck his head out of the port hole to be able to breath.

The “Angel” helicopter was on station on the starboard side of the ship, its normal station to cover the launch that was scheduled at the same time the fire started. The pilots of the helo saw Marv staring at them from his port hole. Though they had no way to communicate other than hand signals, they were able to get sailors on the flight deck to

look over the side. Seeing Marv they started lowering a fire hose down to him.

Since the flight deck at that location was much wider than the hull, they had to swing the hose back and forth for some time before it got close enough that Marv was able to catch it. Marv then used the fire hose to battle the fire in his room for the next three hours.

During the 1967 cruise Moose Lundy and I moved into Marv’s old stateroom and found that they had welded over the port hole. What is ironic is that in WWII, the Navy had commanded that all port holes be welded over and future ships be constructed without them. This was done to increase hull integrity as we had lost many ships in the battles of the Solomon Seas in the taking of Guadalcanal.

Construction on the “O” boat was started during WWII but was not completed. She still had this one port hole. I didn’t know of any others. The “Angel” just happened to see Marv’s headsticking out of it. It begs the question of Divine Intervention. ■



Bombs are jettisoned from the hangar deck of USS ORISKANY (CVA-34), during the fire off Vietnam on 26 October 1966.

George “Moose” Lundy Oriskany Story

Mule:
You are a great guy to take the time to recall this event that forever affected the memories of all present that day.
My story is about as benign as any could be during that awful event. I was manned up for launch and had started to taxi amidships just abeam the aft end of the island about the time the fire started. I could see the smoke coming from the starboard side forward of the island. Lots of people running around, and eventually the Boss tied us down, but we remained in the aircraft.
Not knowing what to do, I just sat. Soon, Chuck Nelson, VA-164, came up beside my plane with no shirt and a wet towel. He just kept throwing up on the deck but seemed very happy to be there. I don't know which area of the ship he came from. As this was going on, Ralph Bisz came up and almost comically for a brief instant I noticed his hair was all singed white and curly like an elderly black man. Finally, I got out of the cockpit and listened to Ralph tell his story of leaving his room with Tom Spitzer and Chico Tardio. Of course, we all now know that they didn't make it, and Ralph luckily stumbled out an unknown hatch into open air as he was about to expire.
Being there on the Flight Deck and not realizing the extent of the tragedy, I could have probably done more but did not.
Following up on Ralph, who later was my roommate in Hanford, when we got to Cubi he had no clothes as his had been destroyed in the fire. So, I loaned him pants and a shirt for our “glad to be alive” party at the Kallayan Officers Club. Ralph, perhaps more than most had a reason to celebrate and really did. Not long into the night, somehow my clothes got lost as Ralph was observed diving into the pool stark naked. To my knowledge, he went back to the ship that way feeling no pain and caring less. Ron Caldwell just kept smiling at Ralph and appeared to be glad he was seemingly having fun. Ralph later accompanied Skipper Foster to Tom Spitzer's funeral in Minnesota (I believe). It was the first time that the Miami boy had ever been in snow.
I think we all learned from this experience except maybe for you and me as we ended up in Marv Reynolds old stateroom with the port hole now welded shut for the 1967 cruise. For my tour as ships' company in *Oriskany*, I chose a stateroom on the third deck below the wardroom.
Keep smiling, take care, and hope to see you in Reno.
Moose ■



Damaged A-4Es of Attack Squadrons VA-163 “Saints” and VA-164 “Ghost Riders” which had been brought up from the hangar deck.

Ken “Mule” Adams Story

We were the midnight to noon carrier, and I had briefed at 2200 hours for the midnight launch. Off we went into a dark night with bad weather in the target areas. My next mission was delayed and then canceled finally about 0600. I went to my quarters in the upper (0-2 level) JO (Junior Officer) bunk room, located just under the flight deck and just forward of mid-ship. This JO bunk room is different than the one located forward and on 2nd deck. I went to sleep quickly. The next thing I remember is hearing the IMC stating that this was a drill, “This is a drill, this is a drill, Fire, Fire, Fire forward starboard side.” I was trying to go back to sleep when Scotty Wilkins came in with loud bang to the door yelling that we were on fire. The smoke that followed him in made it seem real-- we really did have a fire.
There were about 8 of us in the bunk room, and we calmly dressed and discussed our options. We decided to try and crawl out the back way, and I suggested that we wet towels to wrap around our nose and mouth. While I was in the head wetting my towel I looked at all the steel around me and knew that I couldn't break my way out. We left crawling along each holding on to the belt of the man in front of us. Fortunately, we made it to a gun tub that was on the upwind side and clear of smoke. Fritz Schroeder had shown me this way out as a way to get rid of our booze bottles. I guess this could be the first time drinking saved lives.
Later as night began to fall and we were steaming toward the Philippines, Pete Munro and I sat on the forward flight deck with our legs hanging over the cat-walk. We could see and hear the bow wave as the ship cut swiftly through the sea. We really didn't talk as there was nothing we could say. The loss of our friends was too much. We had some old “C” rations that had been warmed by the fire. They really tasted terrible but having had nothing to eat that day we made do. The flight deck was covered with shipmates as no one wanted to go below to sleep so we just laid back and went to sleep under the stars knowing how lucky we were to do so.
My other vivid memory was after the fire. I was down in the lower or forward JO bunk room. It was dark, everything was burned and melted and had that wet smell of fire. My job was to survey the gear of 2 of our pilots we lost in the fire, LTJG Tom Spitzer and ENS Ron “Chico” Tardio. I was to separate personal gear from the Navy gear and pack the personal gear in a newly made plywood box made special for this job. As I went through Chico's gear, I felt guilty as if I was a voyeur. I was invading his personal space, his privacy. I had to look through everything and make sure that anything being sent back to his family wouldn't hurt either him or his family. Little did I know that this was practice for doing this same job many times on my 67 cruise.
Scotty and Fritz saved my life that day, as did an unknown shipmate who pulled me out of the water as I had tripped and gotten stuck underwater in the hangar bay. He saved me from drowning and I never knew who he was. I do, however, still know how lucky I have been. ■



View of the forward flight deck

(Ed. Note: It has been suggested that Skyhawk Association serve as a repository for these first-hand accounts of the Oriskany fire. Based upon this first effort, the Skyhawk Association and surviving Oriskany crew can evaluate the feasibility of that suggestion. Reader comments will be welcome.)

Great Jumpin' Jehosophats!

How many Skyhawks does it take to CARQUAL one aviator?



By Colonel D. R. "Duke" Stanton, USMC (Ret.)

(Although this story never made it to Grandpaw Pettibone, I can only imagine what he would say.)

It was October 8, 1962 and the USS Kearsarge (CVS-33) was operating in the Pacific as a recovery ship in support of the recovery capsules for the Project Mercury orbital space flight of astronaut Walter Schirra. Commissioned on 2 March 1946 she saw no action in WWII but as a straight deck Essex class carrier she saw plenty of action in the Korean engagement. In the late 1950's and with the approach of jet aircraft in the Navy, she was modernized with an angle deck but was reclassified as an antisubmarine carrier and kept this designation until called upon to support the Vietnam War and regained her CVA designation.

I was a First Lieutenant at the time and flying A-4B's with the VMA-214 Blacksheep out of MCAS Kaneohe. It had been arranged that as the Kearsarge had completed the recovery of the space capsule, Sigma 7, and had returned astronaut Schirra to Honolulu and as she now had some free time, that it would be nice if they would make their deck available to the attack squadrons at Kaneohe to renew their carrier qualifications.

The squadron had been doing Field Mirror Landing Practice (FMLP) for several weeks under the instruction and guidance of our LSO, Captain Jimmy Sells (later killed in Vietnam when piloting a KC-130 tanker, which was involved with an F-4 Phantom mid-air collision).

Finally the big day came and the squadron launched our A-4B's with two staggered overhead times of six aircraft each. I was in the first division with an

overhead time of 0800. You can imagine that with that overhead time, driving to the squadron, getting suited up, final briefing, and preflight, not much sleep was had the night before.



A-4 #1 • The division lead contacted the carrier and received a Charlie on arrival. We shifted to a right echelon and entered the break and began to work. (Requalification required two touch and goes and ten traps). Things were going well for me and I got my two touch and goes and had seven traps. As I was waiting for the catapult for my eighth trap I notified Prifly that I was now Bingo fuel. I guess that as I was doing fairly well, Prifly advised me to continue. I was fired off and when I got to the 180 I advised the LSO of my call sign and that the gear, flaps and hook were down and I was now Bingo minus two hundred. The LSO advised me to continue but the A-4 in front of me got hung up in the wires and I was given a wave off and advised that my signal was Bingo back to Kaneohe and so I returned.

A-4 #2 • After I had landed and was taxiing back, Ground Control called and said that the ship wanted me back as soon as I could make it. I turned in my present aircraft, obtained another one and

proceeded back to the ship. The LSO wanted one more touch and go and then begin my arrestments. I did the touch and go and one arrestment and as I was fired off the catapult the "Angel" helicopter called

Prifly and advised that there was a lot of smoke coming out of the hangar bay. Prifly "Rogerred" and within a few seconds ordered all airborne aircraft to bingo to the beach! *(One of the A-4's had been struck below for single point refueling through the belly but when they attached the hose the connection only fastened on one side and when the fuel was turned on it spewed fuel across a still hot tail pipe and ignited. Quick reaction on the part of the crew shut off*

the fuel and contained the fire, but by then we were all entering the landing pattern at Kaneohe).

A-4 #3 • As we landed at Kaneohe, the Tower advised us that the ship wanted us back as soon as we could make it. So, I grabbed another aircraft and just as I lifted off there was a "Bang", followed by vibrations and a tremendous amount of black smoke that entered the cockpit through the eyeball diffusers. I notified the Tower that I was declaring an emergency and turning downwind and would be flying into the Morest gear, shutting down and evacuating the aircraft and that I would need a tow as soon as they could get one out. *(Turned out that the aircraft wasn't on fire but that the air conditioning unit in the nose gear well had come apart and was in the process of destroying itself).*

A-4 #4 • I went to the VMA-214 Ready Room and the Duty Officer told me that they wanted me back at the carrier and assigned me another aircraft. I arrived back at

the carrier, dropped my hook and took another arrestment. As I was taxiing to the catapult and they began to position me, I was notified that a piece of gear had been installed incorrectly and I was being struck below so that they could correct it.

A-4 #5 • I was lowered on the elevator to the hangar deck and as I was exiting the aircraft, I was notified that the powers that be wanted me to take another aircraft that was being sent up on the elevator and to continue with my quals.

I dragged my gear and myself up to the flight deck, strapped in and was fired off. *(It was getting "pink" outside by now).* One more trap and I would be done! I made the trap but was notified that I had blown a tire. I was taxied to an unused

portion of the deck where our maintenance folks jacked me up and changed the tire. Seeing as I was the last bird to leave the carrier they hung a Huffer on my centerline and fired me off into the dark. I landed back at Kaneohe at 1938 hours, with 9.1 hours in the saddle after a very long day with no lunch but at least I was qualified.

Now, what do you think Grandpaw Pettibone would have to say? I can imagine at least a "Gee, Willikins!" and maybe a couple of, "Great Balls of Fire!" Anything after that I will leave to your imagination.

(Colonel "Duke" Stanton served thirty years with the Marine Corps and now lives in Berryville, VA with his wife, Pat. - Editor)



SIZE DOES MATTER

Modelers' Corner

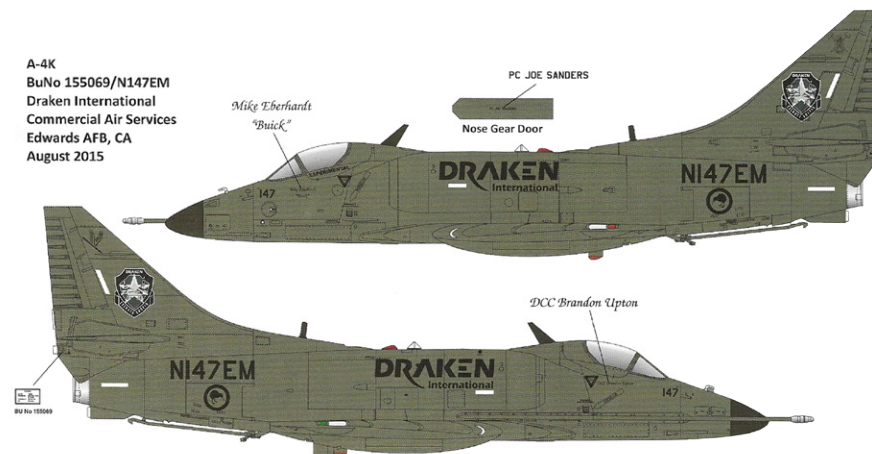
By Joe Turpen

Obtaining Model Decals

When a modeler buys a kit, he or she doesn't necessarily want to use the markings provided by the kit manufacturer. For that reason, the manufacturer usually provides two options for different markings on the model.

First, if they have a computer with a good graphics program, they can just make their own decals. Second, they can use decals that have been produced by a different company that specializes in aftermarket sales. If you are looking for a specific decal sheet, it will just take a few (hopefully) minutes at either the companies' website or at the site of an online hobby shop to find the decals you are looking for. If the markings you're looking for are extremely old, and probably out of production, there is always ebay as well.

These companies are continuously producing decals for aircraft from WWI to the current day. You just have to hope they have the ones you are looking for. The decal sheets will provide not only the decals but a complete set of instructions and information necessary to paint the model then place the decals.



Visit [<http://skyhawk.org/article-modeling/modelers-hangar-bay>]





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