

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 26-4



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

Winter 2020-2021

<http://skyhawk.org>



THE PREZ SEZ

By George "Woodpecker" Blosser

Greetings from the new Prez

As most of you probably know I relieved Steve Linder as President of the Association this past September. First and foremost, I offer my sincere appreciation to Steve for his hard work and personal assistance to me during this transition. I was not initially slated to assume the Presidency, but due to some unanticipated issues, I was called upon at the last minute to help. The association has had many fine and dedicated leaders, and I will do my best to continue that tradition. My goal is to endorse what is printed on the cover of the magazine, "A-4Ever."

Career History

I was born and raised in Exeter, California, a small town in the Central California San Joaquin Valley known for its agriculture production. Ironically, it is 46 miles east of NAS Lemoore my first duty station following the training command. After Pre-Flight in class 46-62 and Primary Flight Training at NAS Sausfield Field, I entered the Jet Pipeline and received my wings at NAS Beeville, Texas, on 19 May 1964. I received orders to A-4s via VA-125 at NAS Lemoore and my first assignment was to VA-155 in Air Wing 15. After three carrier cruises, 338 carrier landings and 144 combat missions over North Vietnam, I left the Navy and pursued a career in the airline industry. I retired from Delta Airlines in 2003 after spending my last 3 years in the Boeing 727 Flight Training Department as Fleet Captain. I joined the Skyhawk Association in the summer of 1995 and then was elected to the BOD in 2009.

New BOD Member

Early last summer an unexpected vacancy occurred on the board. Skyhawk member Charlie Stender agreed to have his name placed in nomination. The BOD subsequently unanimously approved a motion to place Charlie on the board for a 3-year term. He will make a great addition to the board and for those of you who do not know Charlie a summary of his experience is listed below:

- 1965 cruise USS Oriskany VA-163
- 1966 cruise USS Saratoga VA-34
- 1967 - 69 PAX River NATC
- 1970 - 72 VX-5 China Lake
- 1970, 77 - 79, 85 TWA
- 1972 - 77 Point Mugu F-14 Test with Grumman
- 1972 - 89 Naval Air Reserve Pt Mugu
- 1980 - 97 Weapons Test with Hughes Aircraft Pt Mugu, Van Nuys, LAX
- 1997 - 2009 Weapons Test with Raytheon Van Nuys, LA



George "Woodpecker" Blosser

BOD Meetings

Our last BOD Meeting was via Zoom on 11 September and while another BOD Meeting has not been scheduled, we will probably have a spring meeting during the spring of 2021. Whether it will be an in-person meeting or via Zoom remains to be seen. Our fall BOD Meeting will be during Hook 21 assuming, of course, there is an in-person Tailhook gathering. If this materializes, we'll have an Attack Ready Room and our annual luncheon. Our luncheon speaker is scheduled to be Charlie Plumb.

SDOs

Our Squadron Duty Officers (SDO) program remains an important part of communications within the organization. Most of the empty slots have been filled, however, there are a few vacancies. Take a look at the official list on the website and see if you might be able to help out with any of the vacancies. The website list can be easily accessed at <http://a4skyhawk.info/page/faq-research-contact>. For Navy units contact Terry Wolf, SDO Coordinator (twold@comcast.net). For Marine and international units, contact Bill Egen (bill.egen123@gmail.com)

Moving forward as a general reminder, if you have any reunion events scheduled please let us know so that the information can be posted in the A-4 Journal. Bob Hickerson and Dave Dollarhide are working all the time to keep the Journal up and running. We owe both a debt of gratitude for their tireless efforts to keep the magazine going with continuing articles about our beloved A-4. To this end, if any of you have articles to share please let us know, as our editors are always looking for new material.

As previously announced, our Skyhawk PayPal account is back up and available. This should make renewing your subscription much easier. And as always if your contact information changes please forward that information so we can update our records.

I hope everyone enjoyed a great holiday season and my sincere best wishes for a virus free 2021.

A-4s Forever
"Woodpecker" sends



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

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION, INC. Officers and Directors

George Blosser
President and Director (FY 21)
[george.blosser@gmail.com]

Terry Wolf
VP (Navy) and Director (FY 21)
[tairwolf@comcast.net]

Bill Ravgiala
VP (Marine) and Director (FY 22)
[gunnyrav@gmx.com]

Terry Cooney
Secretary and Director (FY 20)
[skyhawkasn@gmail.com]

Mark Williams
Treasurer and Director (FY 21)
[rogerwilco14@gmail.com]

Gene Atwell
Webmaster and Director (FY 21)
[geneatwell@gmail.com]

Charlie Stender
Director (FY 22)
[charlie.stender@verizon.net]

Dave Dollarhide
Director (FY 20)
[davedollarhide@msn.com]

Pete Cole
Director (FY 21)
[pete_cole@verizon.net]

Bill Egen
Director (FY 22)
[zerocep@ec.rr.com]

Todd Frommelt
Director (FY 20)
[toddfrommelt6913@att.net]

Ed Jobin
Director (FY 21)
[edjobin47@gmail.com]

Ted Langworthy
Director (FY 22)
[FLYBEAR@peoplepc.com]

Joe Turpen
Director (FY 22)
[forrestal@fewpb.net]

Skyhawk Association, Inc.
2421 Clubside Drive
Beavercreek, OH 45431
[skyhawkasn@gmail.com]
Website: www.skyhawk.org

BOMBS AWAY!

• Winter 2020-2021 •

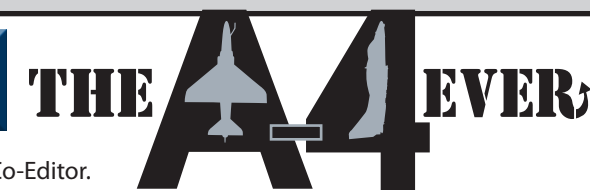
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JOURNAL STAFF



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

Dave "Hide" Dollarhide – Co-Editor.

Gene "Blade" Atwell – Webmaster.

Feature Contributors: George Blosser, Bill "Jigger" Egen, Todd "Hun" Frommelt, Peter Mersky, Boom Powell, Joe Turpen, Gary Verver, Mark "Senator" Williams, Jack "Puresome" Woodul.

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Contributions

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

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

On the Cover: VA-155 pilot mans his A-4E aboard USS *Coral Sea*, circa 1965. Note one only bomb with mechanical fuse. Photo by Bill Kish

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.net

■ **From: Charles Nothe**

I am from the Monson, Mass, a small town in Western Massachusetts, the same town as Lt Kenneth Berube. There were five men from my small town who died in Vietnam. I am writing a book called Monson's Warriors and I would like more information, if possible, on Lt Berube's time at Chu Lai. He was shot down by ground fire on Aug 11, 1967. Nail number Bu No 151022.

I am a Vietnam veteran serving 1969-1970 and I thought it important to highlight the service of all the Monson Vietnam casualties. I knew all the other four as Monson is a small Western Mass community as I went to school with them, but Lt Berube was four years older than I am.

■ **From: Dennis Carroll**

I have forwarded this to Bill (Egen-Ed) who has the historical data plus the USMC connections. The book *Vietnam Air Losses* by Chris Hobson is a very good reference and does have the following information with regard to the Lt Berube loss. Note the different Bur Number so Bill might be able to sort that out as well to find someone who knows more detail.

11 August 1967 "A-4E 151088 VAM-211, Mag-12, USMC, Chu Lai 1st Lt Kenneth Allen Berube (KIA) - A flight of Marine Corps A-4s was providing close air support to friendly troops near Hiep Duc, 20 miles west of Tam Ky, when one of the aircraft was hit by ground fire as it rolled in on the target. 1Lt Berube may have been wounded as he was not seen to eject from his aircraft before it crashed."

I came from a small farming community in the Ozark hills of Missouri with a graduating class of 51 boys in 1964. Few went to college and almost all went to Vietnam. We had 5 killed out of the class as well. All from the Army. What you are doing is special for them and the community. Here's wishing you the best for your efforts.

■ **From: Bill "Jigger" Egen**

Thank you for doing this. Ken was officially listed as Killed-in-Action (KIA) after being listed as missing in action (MIA). Here is the Marine Air Group 12 summary (there is none from VMA-211 as they had moved out of country in late August of '67 while he was still in a missing status):

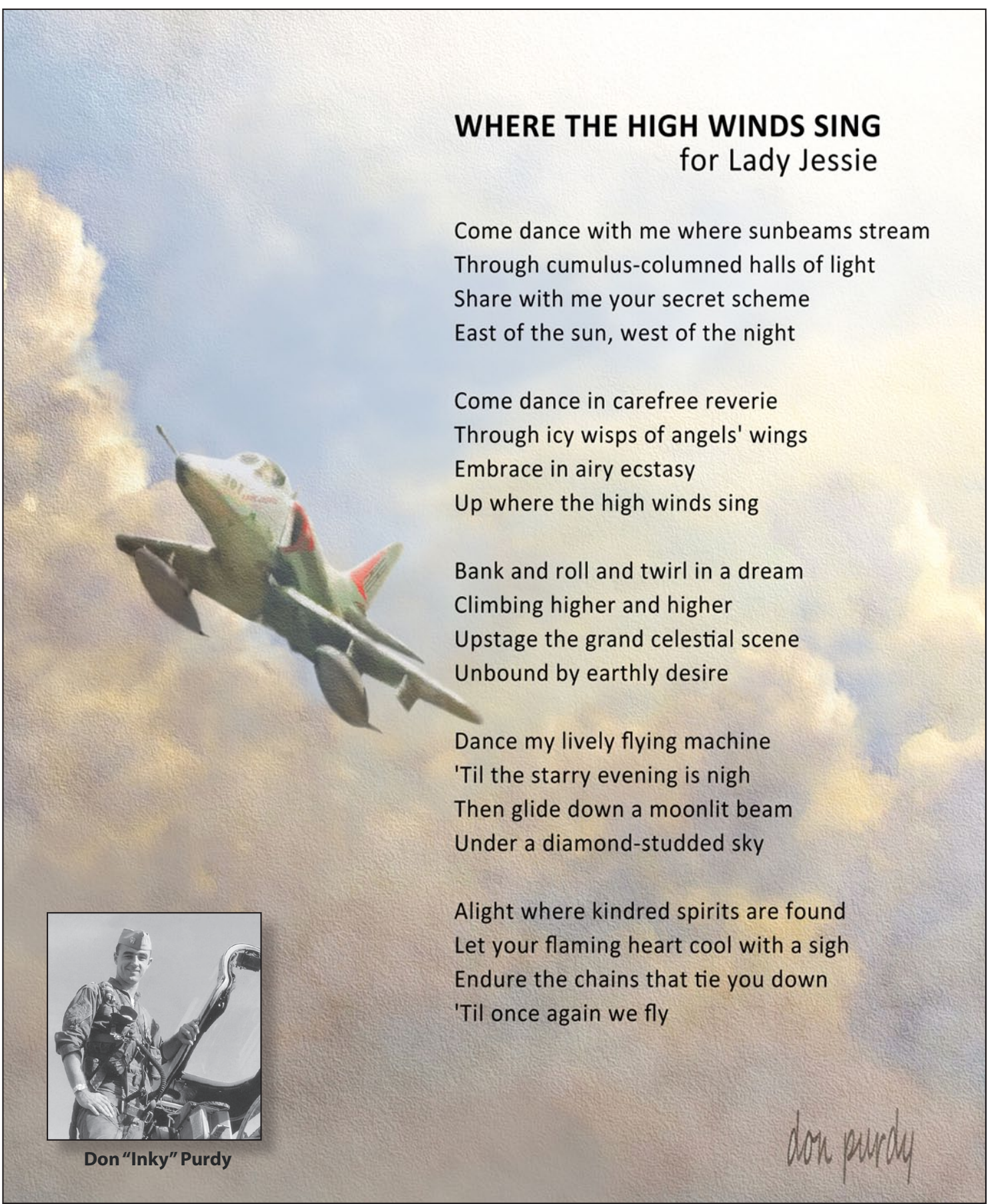
"(S) On 11 Aug 1967, 1stLt Kenneth H. BERUBE 092823, USMCR, was reported missing in action, when his A4E aircraft crashed and disintegrated 25 miles WNW of Chu Lai, Quang Ngai, RVN. Lt BERUBE's aircraft was on a close air support mission during Operation Cochise. On 3 Sep 67, it was confirmed that Lt BERUBE did not eject and died in the aircraft when it crashed and disintegrated. His status was changed from missing in action to killed in action on 3 September 1967..."

Another good resource for info is the *Coffelt Database*, just Google it. Select "Search CBD", then select "Name Searches"- enter first (Kenneth) and last name and his page will come up- go the end of his thread and select Go under "Detail"- scroll down and this will allow you to read his DD1300 Casualty Report and a 2 page summary of the Joint Task Force- Full Accounting effort (JTF-FA) and their attempt to recover his body.

I have also added Bob Lange on this email as he is the Skyhawk Association Squadron Duty Officer for VMA-211- he may be able to get details about Ken's time at Chu Lai by tasking his member list.

■ **From: Don "Inky" Purdy**

I have sent a copy of my book *Where the High Winds Sing* to the Fredericksburg, TX address via surface mail in the hopes that it might be of interest for the A-4Ever publication. I have also attached some samples of my A-4 related artwork. Should you be able to use any of this material, I can supply any additional information you might need.



WHERE THE HIGH WINDS SING for Lady Jessie

Come dance with me where sunbeams stream
Through cumulus-columned halls of light
Share with me your secret scheme
East of the sun, west of the night

Come dance in carefree reverie
Through icy wisps of angels' wings
Embrace in airy ecstasy
Up where the high winds sing

Bank and roll and twirl in a dream
Climbing higher and higher
Upstage the grand celestial scene
Unbound by earthly desire

Dance my lively flying machine
'Til the starry evening is nigh
Then glide down a moonlit beam
Under a diamond-studded sky

Alight where kindred spirits are found
Let your flaming heart cool with a sigh
Endure the chains that tie you down
'Til once again we fly

don purdy

I was a Scooter driver in VA-164 (Ghostriders) in CVW "Bloody" 16 during the '67/'68 Oriskany cruise. I did the subsequent Ghostrider tour with CVW 21 in USS Hancock, completing 218 combat missions before going to VA-127 as an instructor. I then flew for several years in Angola in some "extracurricular" bush type operations during the UNITA uprising. After that I flew with Flying Tigers Air Freight and eventually wound up retiring from NASA Ames as an Aviation Safety Analyst and Technical Editor in 2018.

Thanks for all you do and keep up the outstanding work on The A-4 Ever magazine. BZ!

P.S. I have cc'd skyhawkasn and Dave Dollarhide on this since the sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org address (as listed in the Journal) has bounced twice.

■ **From: Dave "Hide" Dollarhide**

It's our fault, as we have an old email ID in the magazine, so thanks for the update. We'll correct it in the winter issue to sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net.

The snail mail address in Fredericksburg is the address of Bob "Raven" Hickerson, so he'll get that copy and I just bought your Kindle edition and look forward to reading it.

(Don's book can be found on Amazon in paper or ebook. - Ed)

■ **From: Greg Ward, Air Zoo, Aircraft Restoration Manager** (Portage MI museum - Ed)

We have a Douglas A-4B (Built as an A4D-2) / Skyhawk here, and we need to obtain fresh, or better tires for it. The existing tires are cracked from dry rot and as a result, we're afraid to bring them up to proper tire pressure. Would you happen to have any leads on where we may bought some? Or could you give us a good contact for A-4 tires? Please see the attached pictures for more details.

■ **From: Dave "Hide" Dollarhide**

I've talked to Mike "Maj" McDougall who owns "Fighting Classics" and is in the business of restoring A-4s and other warbirds. He'll be glad to help you with the tires and is expecting you to contact him. Maj is copied to this email and his phone is (208) 606-2273. I hope this works out for the two of you. We're happy to be of assistance at the Skyhawk Assn.

(Followup: Greg and Maj worked it out and the needed tires were shipped to the Air Zoo - Ed)

continued...

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

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

LETTERS continued. .

■ **From: Mike “Razun/Sleek” Boston**

Good afternoon “Raven”. So happy to receive the latest edition of A4Ever today.

Being a former VA-195 “Chippy” I had an interest in the 7-page article on the VA-192 “Dragons”. Then, reading on Page 13, “On 1 January 1962, the Imperial Valley beckoned...and VA-192 shifted...to NAS Lemoore.” Having commanded NAF El Centro, I can say that is in the Imperial Valley, not NAS Lemoore.

I served with the VA-56 Champs in the OFRP in USS Midway. Also, while my Skyhawk time was limited to hours while XO/CO of the West Pac A4E Adversary Squadron VC-5, that was clearly the most rewarding and fun flying I had in my entire commissioned USN service (1963-90).

Having also served as an enlisted man under the leadership of Ensign T.R. Swartz in VF-41, I am proud to say I’m most proud to have been a Carrier-Sailor!! My Ford Ranger Texas license plates read “A4-4EVER”.

■ **From: Bob “Raven” Hickerson**

Boston, good to hear from you also. Judy and I are plugging along, hoping to outsmart the virus. I hope you and your family are safe.

The article about VA-192 is a reprint from The Hook, so I’d like to get your comment to the Senior Editor, who personally wrote the article. Could you provide a correction to those sentences at the bottom of page 13 that I could forward to the author, or alternatively submit them directly to the editor, Hill Goodspeed?

■ **From: Dror Askenazi**
Subject: My dad is not dead!!!

Please fix the info (*On the Skyhawk website*) that says my father died. He is very much alive today. Nissim Ashkenazy was not KIA. He

was a POW in Egypt, shot down by two SA-2 missiles on August 19, 1969. I was born July 14th 1974 so I’m a living proof. :)

From: Gary Verver

Our apologies Dror, I have fixed the error on our website. Unfortunately, errors do creep in and although we had it right in the narrative, we did have it wrong in the summarization.

From: Dror Askenazi

Thank you for fixing the KIA error. I actually came across that error when I was fishing for information. As far as I know, in 1968 my dad came (*From Israel to the US – Ed*) to the VA-44 Hornets to train on the A-4. As a gift he got this Zippo. I Have the Zippo but the Squadron Symbol that was attached to it was lost a long time ago. My dad’s 83rd Birthday is coming up and I’d like to surprise him with this significant piece from his past. Might you have any leads for me? Where can I buy or make one? Any help or leads will be greatly appreciated!



From: Gary Verver

Hello Dror, your best bet might be to contact Zippo at [Customize It | Zippo.com](#)

(*Anyone who has information for a Zippo lighter logo for VA-44 can contact Dror at drorashkenazi@gmail.com - Editor*)

(*Editor’s note: The following request for information concerning a Skyraider accident was forwarded by Slick Katz for Ron Tully and the family of Lt Robert G Schell. This request was handled by Gary Verver, whose incredible research skills have been invaluable to the Skyhawk Association and others for many years.*)

■ **From: Slick Katz, President, USMC/Combat Helicopter & Tiltrotor Association for Ron Tully.**

Lt. Robert G. Schell of VMA 331, MAG 31 at MCAS Miami was critically injured on June 29, 1954 in an a/c accident in Davie, Fla. He died of those injuries on June 30, 1954 at the VA Hosp. Coral Gables. Where can I find the gov’t accident report online. I am researching his death for a family member thru Korean War Project. Thanks for your help. Semper Fi, Ron Tully

From: Gary Verver:

Slick, as far as I know the accident reports aren’t online and require a Freedom of Information Act request. What I have from the 30 June 1954 Sarasota Herald Tribune is below.

From: Ron Tully

Tremendous, tremendous, tremendous! That will be a blessing to Lt. Schell’s loved ones.

Hialeah Pilot Hurt In Practice Landing Try

MIAMI, June 29 (AP)—A pilot seriously injured and burned in the crash of his marine fighter plane today was flown directly from the crash scene to Veterans Hospital by helicopter.

The pilot, 1st Lt. Robert G. Schell of Hialeah, was making simulated carrier landings at a Marine Corps field near Davie, west of Fort Lauderdale.

Such landings are made with a signal officer waving directions, just as they are on a carrier at sea. Something went wrong and Schell’s single-engined Douglas Skyraider plane piled up and caught fire.

Rescue workers in asbestos suits pulled him from the plane. The helicopter took him to the Veterans Hospital at Coral Gables, landing on the lawn at the hospital entrance.

NEW MEMBERS

Col. Lawrence Kelley • APO, AE
George Roberts • Laguna Niguel, CA
Larry Duthie • Walla Walla, WA
James Mallory • Suwanee, GA
Daniel Ervin • Florence, SC
Ernesto Howard • Nellis, NV

Thomas Murphy • Putnam Valley, NY
Robert Maimiero • Palm Springs, CA
Dennis O’Donoghue • Eagle Point, OR
Alexander Hadad • Goldsboro, NC
Nicholas Garcia • Palmdale, CA
Joanne Pajak • Colcott, CT

Frank Adams • Southlake, TX
Ernie Mares • San Diego, CA
Richard Tiernan • Bradenton, FL
Joe Pierce • St. Louis, MO
Kevin Bertram • Washington, DC

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



■ **From: Doug Clarke, CAPT, USN**
Subject: Bloody Sixteen: The USS Oriskany and Air Wing 16 during the Vietnam War.

Seeing Denny Weichman’s smiling face when I opened the Fall 2020 issue brought back a flood of memories. Denny was my best friend in the Navy. After making two cruises together in Spads we kept in touch over the years—chiefly with me at the receiving end of many of his famous practical jokes. Oh, I get my own back once or twice, but the score ended far in his favor. Then we were in the same squadron again in 1972 as we went through the A-7 RAG on the way to our XO/CO tours. My Seattle high school’s 20th reunion happened to take place during our weapons’ deployment in Yuma. Since we weren’t working that weekend the skipper let us take a cross-country to Seattle, a city Denny had never visited. Now my graduating class was more than 600 strong. With his affable personality and glib line, he convinced many of my class-mates that they remembered him. In fact, by the time the evening was over I would swear more know him than knew me! Denny was larger than life in so many ways, but I fear that Peter Fey might have added a couple of inches to his height when he described him as being six foot six inches tall.

■ **From: Todd “Hun” Frommelt** (*Hun is a Skyhawk Association Director – Ed*)

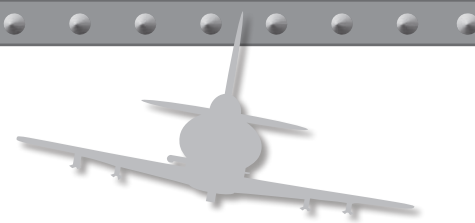
I got my Fall ‘20 issue of *The Hook* today, and the ad (below) caught my eye. Seems like we’re regularly fielding queries regarding donated aviation items and thought you might like to pass this to the Board, plus to have in our back pockets next time that comes up. I have NOT researched it much, but a P’cola bar/restaurant can’t be all that bad. Might give the ad copy a spot in the winter digital edition? Just thinking. I know, dangerous for a Marine. Hun (*Editor note: Mat Garretson, a director with the A-7 Association is the driving force for this venture*)

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

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

Read?

you think
we *read*?



ABOVE AVERAGE NAVAL AVIATION THE HARD WAY

Author: Smith, D.D.
Publication date: 05/27/2018
350 pp. \$15.99

Anyone reading a naval aviation book review these days is bound to realize that there is an abundance of books from which to choose. Despite that, many of our retired shipmates have elected to write an autobiography detailing their life of service. Some of these works are good and some are excellent. This one is well *Above Average*.

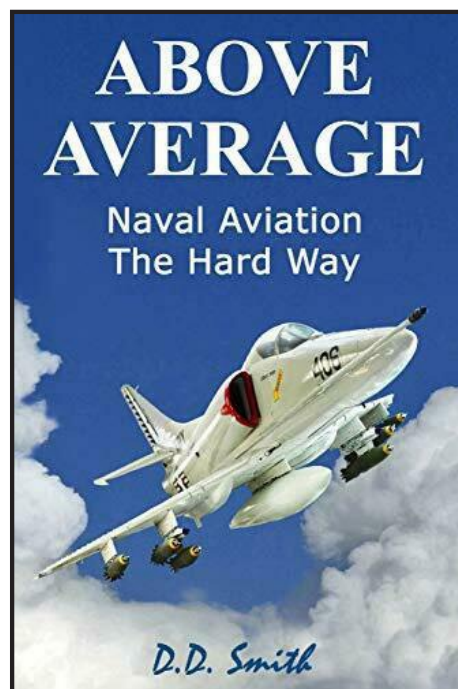
At 354 pages, *Above Average* is a long read, but given the career of CDR Smith, it would have been difficult to cover his story in less space.

Starting from humble beginnings in rural Minnesota, he rose to become Chief Test Pilot of the Navy in a career of only 21 years. He got his start with a Navy recruiter who introduced him to the NAVCAD program, and after a slight hiccup with the flight physical, he was accepted for the program. The Navy sent a recruiter in a helicopter to deliver his enlistment papers (you can imagine the stir that caused), and Smith abandoned his budding career as a radio disc jockey to strive for a career as a Navy pilot.

Any naval aviator should be impressed by the quality and number of Smith's experiences in the Navy. He did well in the U.S. Navy Training Command, with the exception of one low-level navigation training flight that almost terminated his flight training. When preparing for that late syllabus training-flight, Smith was told by a fellow student that it was normal to flat-hat (fly very low) during a low-level navigation flight no matter what the instructor said. Based on that, Smith made the mistake of busting his minimum altitude and ignoring the instructor's calls to climb. If you went through

Navy flight training, you can imagine the outcome of that stunt, and if you didn't, see page 63 of *Above Average*.

Despite that misguided training hop, from the beginning Smith demonstrated talent in the cockpit and courage in the execution of difficult and dangerous missions. From the time he was just out of the fleet training squadron, where the A-4 Skyhawk was his first aircraft, he amassed an impressive resume. Some stats tell the story of his service:



almost 5,000 hours in high-performance aircraft, 60 months-time at sea on 8 major deployments, 33 aircraft models flown, 804 carrier arrested landings (196 night), and 138 combat missions in Vietnam. In addition, he commanded VA-147, a Navy A-7E squadron aboard USS *Constellation*.

In late January 1968, Smith was selected for the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School at Patuxent River, an assignment that required a strong background in math and engineering that Smith did not have initially. However, he worked hard and established relationships that

gave him the skills that he needed. In fact, in his following assignment at Pax River, he was assigned to duty in Flight Test and FQ&P (Flying Qualities and Performance), a coveted placement.

Smith led the two-year spin test program for the Navy A-7. Later, as Chief Test Pilot for the U.S. Navy, he was assigned to the team being assembled to investigate problems that the F-14 was having with spinning and high angle of attack maneuvering. On the 12th hop of that aircraft in the test series, CDR Smith's aircraft inexplicitly entered a violent flat-spin mode that, according to Navy training information, was not survivable. In short order, his oxygen mask filled with blood and vessels in his eyeballs were popping. He was experiencing a yaw rate of 180 degrees per second and found himself pulling 7 ½ g eyeballs out. During his efforts to recover, he passed out at least once, and he had insufficient strength to initiate an ejection until the g slacked off at about 12,00 ft.

The book's title, *Above Average*, sums it up. Throughout his flying career, if there was a challenging assignment up for grabs, Smith was most likely there looking to be involved. The beauty of this book is that the reader can man-up and go along, gaining insight into one of the Navy's most interesting and demanding careers.

D.D. Smith is an accomplished writer. His work is easy to read, yet powerful and attracting. I found it hard to put *Above Average* down, partly because the narrative was paced so accurately, but primarily because the story was so engaging and informative (and not just for Navy aviators).

I recommend, of course, that you buy this book and make it part of your professional library. I doubt that you will be sorry you did.

Reviewed by Bob Hickerson



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

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



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

ODE TO BLUE CHIP

By Col Steve Sanford USMCR (Ret)

In a previous issue (Vol 26-1) Lt Col Mike Ashworth and Major Phil Marrie wrote a poignant tribute to a former VMA-331 squadron CO. Unfortunately, I now find myself in a similar situation, and I want to tell you about a great friend of mine, Lt Col Michael Dunning Ashworth 'Blue Chip,' who passed away on July 12, 2020 at the age of 76. His following service was at the National Cemetery in Tallahassee, FL with his wife, Anita and sons Marcus and Brian in attendance. Three of our Vietnam squadron mates, Bruce Schwanda, Terry Wojcik and Jack Reed, were able to attend. I fought with conflicting feelings about going versus the various COVID considerations, but regrettably, I was not able to attend. Thanks to the three for attending and representing all our VMA-311 brethren.

I met Mike when he reported to VMA-311 in Chu Lai at the end of December 1969 or the early part of January 1970. We had remained friends and professional compatriots since then. The last time I saw Mike was at the A-4 reunion in Pensacola in November 2018 where we and our wives sat together for the Blue Angels show. It was as if 48 years had not passed by. At that time Mike was beginning to suffer from several ailments that eventually took his life.

Mike's career in the Marine Corps ran from TBS to being one of the first Marines to complete US Air Force flight training. Many may not know, but the Marine Corps began using USAF flight training in 1968 as the Navy pipeline could not accommodate the throughput requirements of the USMC. Mike was then stationed at MCAS Yuma, AZ to complete transition training to the A-4 Skyhawk and earn his Navy Wings of Gold. Upon completion of the transition and training syllabus, Mike was ordered to Chu Lai, Republic of South Vietnam. During his time at VMA-311, Mike flew in excess of 300 missions and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. After our Vietnam tour, Mike and I served as instructor pilots at VMAT-102 at MCAS Yuma AZ.

As many times in the Marine Corps our paths split, and Mike went East, and I stayed West. Mike spent years as the AMO, XO and Co of units at MCAS Cherry Point, NC while

I decided to become an airline puke. I came back on active duty after my aborted airline 'career.' Mike was the CO of the Marine Air Reserve Training Detachment at NAS Cecil Field, FL when I re-connected with him in 1986. Mike retired shortly thereafter in 1988. He remained in Florida and personally built a log house by himself near Tallahassee where he remained until he passed away.

Mike will always be remembered by his combat squadron mates and his other Marine Corps friends and associates as a superb, firm fair and disciplined Marine Corps Officer and Aviator.

How did the call sign 'Blue Chip' evolve?

During the Vietnam War, 7th AF HQ in Saigon had the call sign of 'Blue Chip.' In the summer of 1970 while in Danang, Mike was assigned additional duties as a night MAG-11 Operations Watch Officer (The Barrel Watch). At that time, MAG-11 consisted of 5 squadrons; VMA-311 (A-4s), VMFA-115 (F-4s), VMA(AW)-225 (A-6s), VMO-2 (OV-10s) and H&MS-11 (TA-4s). One evening while Mike was on watch, the F-4 outfit reported that none of their aircraft on the daily report had an up operational radar. One of their fragged missions from 7th AF was to have a BARCAP for 2 F-4s up around Vinh. When Mike saw the daily report he logically thought 'how can the F-4s fly a BARCAP to intercept MIGs with no operating radar?' So, he called 'Blue Chip' and turned in the BARCAP mission to be re-fragged. Well, the proverbial Sierra hit the fan. The Group XO (Chicken Little) and the -115 CO descended upon the Barrel and berated Mike's decision to cancel the mighty F-4s' rare opportunity to bag a MIG. Mike stood his ground and the hapless pair decided to bring the MAG-11 CO, Al Pommerenk, into the mix. Upon hearing Mike's rationale for making his decision as the Group CO's direct representative, Col Pommerenk sided with Mike. Thus, the legend of 'Blue Chip' was born.

Mike will be dearly missed by all who had the fortune to serve with him or for him.

Semper Fidelis, 'Blue Chip.'

Tom Brown, Madera CA, 5/14/2020
John Capito, Bowling Green, KY, 9/2020
Norm Davies, North Chatham, MA, 9/21/2020
Mike Erskine, Willowbrook, IL, 10/31/2020
Gerit Fenenga, Nipomo, CA, 07/02/2018
Jack Harris, Santa Barbara, CA 3/6/2020
Jerry "Heap" Kortuem, Fayetteville, AR, 7/9/2020
Andrew Ley, Dedham, MA, 10/20/2020
Bruce Rutherford, Southern Pines, NC, 9/2020
Joe Schneider, Abilene, TX, 9/2020
Chuck Sprietsma, Beaufort, SC, 12/2020
Richard Taber, Pittsboro, NC, 9/18/2020
Wally Vance, Orange Park, FL, 5/22/2020
John "Jack" W. Warrender, Morehead City, NC, 1/8/2021

JIM MORIN, A LEADER - VA-155, A SQUADRON

By Bill Kish

Following flight training, I trained in the A-4 Skyhawk and became a member of VA-155 Silver Foxes in August of 1964. At the time, the squadron was in the final stages of a shore based training cycle and was scheduled to deploy to the Far East in December. I was a brand, new pilot, a “Nugget,” and much to my surprise I found that our squadron consisted of primarily guys like me. We had only four pilots assigned who had ever made an extended deployment and only one of those, our skipper, had flown the A-4 on a cruise. To say that we were inexperienced was an understatement of the highest order. VA-155 was by far the least experienced of any of the squadrons in the Air Wing.

CDR Jim Morin was the executive officer of the squadron and while an experienced carrier pilot, his background in carrier flying had always been in fighter rather than attack aircraft. Since Morin did not have a light attack background, we had very little practical light attack experience to draw from. The air wing had a very aggressive Air Wing Commander (CAG) who by definition was the senior operational aviator on board. CAG had to answer to the Captain of the ship and the Admiral of the task force for the performance of the embarked air wing. Because of our collective lack of experience, the performance of the VA-155 pilots left CAG with much to explain to his superiors during the workups and exercises before the scheduled December deployment. We tried hard, but in the carrier aviation business experience counts. I had the feeling our Commanding Officer (CO) lived in fear of CAG and what his next tirade might bring about from those “moronic” Silver Foxes and their foibles.

On the other hand, the XO, CDR Morin, clearly bristled every time CAG criticized us. After all, our poor performance reflected not only on the CO

but on him as well. CDR Morin was a tremendous contrast. In his world, mistakes were acceptable as part of a process. Making a mistake was OK with him, not correcting it was unacceptable. He constantly harped on what it meant to not only be a professional aviator, but he was unflagging in demanding performance in our squadron collateral duties. It seemed he constantly was critical of every act we performed. At the same time, he had a tremendous sense of humor, let us young bunglers know that he appreciated our efforts, and told us to be proud about our improvement. Without question, all of the young pilots saw him as someone who while very demanding, was not only proud of our progress as aviators but was loyal to us because in his words “we were Morin trained,” and he would go to bat for us with the more senior people when they demanded explanations.

Not long after I joined the squadron, one of our young pilots, a fun-loving bachelor named Ken, had a real confrontation with CDR Morin. Ken had no interest in the Navy other than flying airplanes and intended to get out of the service at the earliest possible date. He was a very competent pilot, but his performance of non-flying duties left something to be desired. His primary motivation was to have a grand party with his life and fly during other times.

One day CDR Morin said “Ken, you know that normal squadron working hours are 8 to 5, if you are not on the flight schedule. How is it that you come in at 10, go to the O Club at 11, return at 1 p.m. and head for the club again at 2?” Ken blithely replied, “It’s not my fault if I can do in two hours what it takes those other guys eight to accomplish.” A very funny statement, but even with the sense of humor the XO possessed, it set up a potential collision. A couple of days later there was an early briefing for a navigation and



weapons mission that was to be flown by four squadron aircraft and chased by an observer aircraft from fleet headquarters. The observer was tasked with evaluating the performance and conduct of the mission. The flight was to be led by the CO and Ken was scheduled to be the #4 aircraft in the flight. At the 0600 briefing, one pilot was missing. Ken was absent. He had experienced a big night previous and was unable to get up this early. When CDR Morin came in to work about 7 a.m. he was outraged when apprised of what had taken place. When Ken finally showed up, the XO put him “in hack” for the upcoming Labor Day weekend and made him the permanent Squadron Duty Officer for the next few weekends. He told the rest of us he was not making an example of Ken, he just expected him to do his job and if he did not this was the treatment he could expect. Ken, for his part, after the punishment said he had not felt so well rested in his life. He said during that period his greatest concern was there might be a fire in the hanger and he might not wake up in time. The XO laughed and shook his head. The good news about this for the rest of the young guys was the XO was concentrating on Ken and his actions.

As the date for our deployment to WESTPAC got closer, the pace of flying and the daily competitions grew more intense. It was very clear by now that not all pilots are blessed with the same skills, but we were all going to be doing the same job. The CO, XO,

and Operations Officer had to make decisions about who was going to be assigned as whose wingman, and they elected not follow a strict seniority rank assignment but rather made some adjustments based on their perceptions of varying degrees of ability. At the same time, and this is something that I still do not understand, even from the perspective of being fifty plus years removed, the squadron was bonding. There was a mutual comradeship, a sense of belonging, a sense of common purpose and trust. Does this always exist in a close unit? Was Jim Morin’s charisma, ability, and humanity cause or effect? At this point, even though I held a real sense of respect for our CO, my inner self said Morin was the core of the squadron.

We were deployed on USS Coral Sea and departed on schedule for the Western Pacific from Alameda, California on December 7, 1964. We were scheduled to have an Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) off the coast of Hawaii before departing for the Far East. During the ORI, I got the opportunity to feel the wrath of Morin because of a breach of one of my collateral duties.

One of my non-flying tasks was to function as the squadron Navigation Officer. I worked in the Operations Department of the squadron because I was the Landing Signal Officer and it was only natural for me to be assigned the Navigation Officer duties. Unfortunately for me, I considered the task of Navigation Officer somewhat beneath my abilities and about the equivalent to

the 8 to 5 routine of the aforementioned Ken. When called upon to furnish some specific charts during the Operational Readiness, Inspection (ORI), I found myself unable to do so. In the privacy of his room aboard the Coral Sea, CDR Morin explained in a less than gentle manner that my job was more than hopping in an airplane, showcasing skills and collecting at the bar from the losers. There was, in his view, a professional series of tasks to be performed and not only was his disappointment with me acute, but any recurrence of this behavior would result in something more than words. When I left his room, I was somewhat surprised the paint was still adhering to the bulkheads. I decided not to test what the result of a further occurrence would be. As the ORI went well, we were subsequently dispatched to the Far East.

The “Tonkin Gulf incident” had happened in August of 1964 and in retrospect, I am sure the contingency

plans for our future were made subsequent to that event but none of us young guys knew anything about what we were about to embark upon. We naively thought we might fly some photo escort stuff in Laos if we even got down to the South China Sea.

In fact, on February 7th 1965 the air group on the USS Coral Sea flew the first “retaliatory” raid into North Vietnam. Sadly, we lost our squadron mate, Ed Dickson, on the mission. His airplane was hit by antiaircraft fire and disabled. He ejected and unfortunately, his ejection seat/parachute system malfunctioned and the North Vietnamese rather joyously announced recovering the body of a US “Air Pirate.” Within a month of this raid Mr. McNamara and President Johnson had launched a program called “Rolling Thunder,” a bombing campaign in North Vietnam designed to bring a halt to North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam and force them to *continued...*



The intensity of the air combat increased during the ensuing months and skipper Morin was always the focal point.

the bargaining table. Being skeptics as many young men tend to be, we asked questions like “do we need the rice? Is this for hot dogs and Mom’s apple pie? Why don’t we send the Vietnamese enough C4 to blow up all the bridges we are so assiduously knocking down and then have Bechtel Corp. offer to rebuild the bridges better than they are now?” In fact, these irreverent guys began to refer to Rolling Thunder as “Rolling Blunder.” Our CO failed to see much humor in comments like this but Morin really “got it.” His response to this cabal of junior officer commentary was “We are operators, not strategic planners.”

During this period, my flight leader and I were accused of making a navigation error and bombing/killing some friendly Laotians. Because of the political sensitivities of the time, and the fact that Laos was technically neutral, we were grounded while a full “Article 32 Board of Inquiry” was convened to determine our fate. As far as CAG, our own CO, and the Admiral of Task Force 77 (The Coral Sea at this time was the flagship of the Admiral) were concerned we might as well have been diagnosed with leprosy. If the Board of Inquiry had found us culpable, we faced a potential court martial for our actions. The only people other than our young warrior mates who offered any support during this inquiry were the Captain of the carrier, CAPT George Cassell, and CDR James B. Morin. In fact, CDR Morin went so far as to suggest this whole thing stunk as far as he was concerned. We were pilots doing our job as best we could and why couldn’t the people at the top show some loyalty? In my heart, I believe our CO was sympathetic to our situation as was CAG, but they were both too concerned about political implications to go out on a limb for a couple of young guns. Ultimately, we were exonerated by the Board of Inquiry, but that is another story.



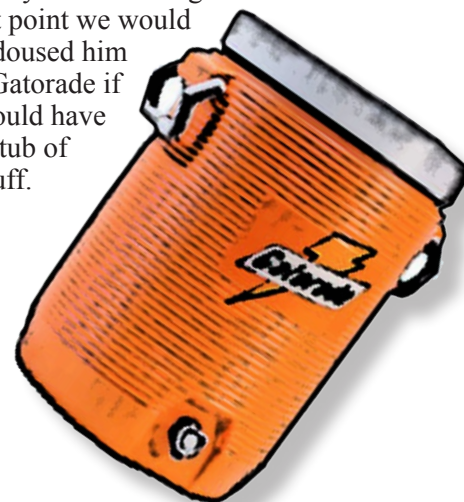
Bill Kish Navy records photo.

After the investigation was complete the Admiral of the task force made a comment for the record, “These are fine young pilots doing a very difficult job.” As only a young man could do, I shared with him what a disingenuous human being I thought he was and how I considered it a disgrace that he was wearing two stars on a uniform that I wore with only one and a half stripes. I shared this comment with CDR Morin and he responded that since I had now been loafing for more than two weeks, I would get to fly extra missions to catch up because we had a squadron policy that everyone should have the same opportunity for heroic action.

In due course, toward the end of May 1965, CDR Morin was given command of the squadron. The change of command was a completely normal rotation because the nominal length

of command at that time was one year. We had just received word though, that our tour on Yankee Station was to be extended. The original plans were for the change of command to take place after we returned home to California. After the ceremony, which was held in Subic Bay in the Philippines, we had an all pilots meeting (APM) and Morin got up and made his opening remarks as skipper. He reiterated his feelings about professionalism in all aspects of our jobs and let it be known that if this squadron could not be the very best on the ship in terms of flying skill, he certainly expected it to be the most colorful. He stared right at Ken as he made that comment. He also said how proud he was to get the opportunity to lead us and as far as he was concerned, we were already the best squadron on the ship. After all, “we were Morin trained.” He also said he was going to institute

a program where all of the junior pilots would lead both sections and divisions of airplanes in combat situations because he “knew we were up to it” and felt we should be trained and experienced in leading. He wanted everyone to be a qualified section and division leader by the time we got home. I think at that point we would have doused him with Gatorade if we would have had a tub of the stuff.



Our extension in the combat zone resulted from a decision in Washington to increase the pressure on the dirty commies. In order to accomplish this, there would now be three carriers instead of two on Yankee Station and we would be number three. Our new return home date was unspecified. There were not a lot of happy campers at that point but the “Skipper,” with that Boston Irishman’s grin, shared with us that things like this happened and we should just “grin and bear it.” Then he said “The grin is optional.” It ended up that we did not return to the U.S. until November of 1965, some 332 days after we departed.

The intensity of the air combat increased during the ensuing months

and skipper Morin was always the focal point. He never suggested anyone do anything that he was not willing to do and at times cautioned about being foolishly aggressive. After one particularly exciting trip as his wingman, the two of us found ourselves debriefing in the Admiral’s Operations room. I was astounded at how far removed these “staff guys” were from what we were doing and we lived on the same ship. It was like they lived in a different civilization up here in Admiral’s country and those stiff in the funny green suits and their opinions down in the ready rooms were not welcome.

We had lost a fair number of people by this point and these deep thinkers had come up with some obscure target

in a very heavily defended area of the country. I looked at the Skipper, smiled and silently mouthed “die hop.” He had a rather incredulous look on his face and still had his flight suit on, wrapped around his waist when he looked at the Admiral’s chief of staff and calmly said, “This is a very ill conceived idea. The target and area photos are unacceptable. I will go if ordered but I will not ask any of my pilots to go on such a fool’s voyage.” The chief of staff looked at him and said “Commander, you are dismissed! Go to your room!” We shuffled out of the debriefing room and I said “Skipper I think you might have just ended your climb toward flag rank but not to worry, the JO’s still think a lot of you and you cannot make

continued...



Bill Kish cockpit.

How could I explain to Morin that I was alive because of one of his techniques in flying airplanes? At the time I could not.

everyone happy.” I don’t remember his reply but it was something quite clever. I honestly believe, there was not a pilot in the squadron that would not have jumped off the flight deck if the Skipper had asked.

During our long deployment he never stopped trying to improve our skills as pilots. These almost daily bits of flying lore ranged from how to think as a formation leader to techniques he had picked up over his years of carrier flying to improve instrument flying skills/life expectancy. For example, when landing at night aboard a carrier the published procedure at the time was to depart a holding pattern at about 20,000 feet, and 20 miles aft of the ship, descend rapidly (in the 5,000 foot per minute range) until 5 thousand feet and then shallow the descent so you arrived astern of the ship at 10 miles, on the assigned recovery bearing and level at 1,000 feet where you changed speed and configuration. This meant slowing the aircraft from 250 knots to about 160 knots and was the point in the approach when the pilot put down the flaps, tailhook and lowered the landing gear. Morin said, “do not aim to level at one thousand feet but rather at twelve hundred feet. That way, just in case you have misread your altimeter by 1000 feet you will probably not fly into the water. (The altimeters in those days were easy to misread by a thousand feet.) I considered myself not susceptible to this type of error but if Morin thought it a good idea how could it hurt?

One night, after a road reconnaissance mission, the approach to the carrier was in conditions where the ceiling was about three thousand feet overcast. Flying beneath that type of overcast over the water is like flying in an ink bottle. I leveled at twelve hundred feet as suggested and changed configuration. As I got in closer to the Task Force it seemed to me that the masthead lights on the plane guard destroyer, positioned about a mile astern of the carrier, were higher than I was. This made no sense

and I thought I must be experiencing vertigo. When it finally dawned on me that the masthead lights I was looking at were in fact, above me. I quickly came to the realization that for the past 4 or 5 miles I had been at 200 feet or less and not twelve hundred feet. I had done the unthinkable. I had made a serious error by misreading the altimeter by 1000 ft. I forced the airplane to climb to about 600 feet, acquired the carrier and somehow got the airplane aboard on the first pass. When I climbed out of the cockpit, my legs were shaking, I could not speak, and by the time I could feel it, my pulse must have been about 180 beats per minute. How could I explain to Morin that I was alive because of one

of his techniques in flying airplanes? At the time I could not. I did tell him about 40 years ago.

By now we were approaching the time we were finally going to get to go back to the states. We had been deployed for almost one full year. We got a message from the bureaucrats running the peacetime Navy that we were almost certainly in violation of Navy Regulations. No instrument flying proficiency checks had been received by them and therefore we were not technically “legal” to operate Naval Aircraft. Needless to say, the guffaws from ready room five could be heard all the way to the Philippines, 600 nautical miles distant. “Skipper,” why don’t you ground



In the Groove.

WEATHER CRITERIA FOR IFR CLEARANCE OPNAV INST 3710.7F 1 JULY 1971			
TAKE-OFF MINIMUMS			
PAR NOT AVAIL	STANDARD	SPECIAL	FORMATION
	300-1		CIRCLING MINIMUMS OR VFR
PAR AVAIL	PAR MIN NOT LESS THAN 200-½	PILOTS DISCRETION	
LANDING (FORMATION)			
COMMENCING		PUBLISHED CIRCLING MINIMUMS OR VFR	
AFTER COMMENCING		PUBLISHED MINIMUMS	
VA-45 FORM 3710/4 (3-72)			(OVER)

Weather Criteria Card - VA-45.

us all and send us home as the last thing we want to do is break the rules?” Morin’s answer to the bureaucrats was priceless. He wrote a letter stating that all of the pilots in the squadron had been flying day and night combat missions for the better part of a year. He, as Commanding Officer, considered that performance to be prima facie evidence of our flying proficiency and as soon as we returned he would submit a special instrument card for all pilots. At about this same time, since “legality” seemed to be an issue with the bureaucrats, Ken and I found a section of the A-4 operating manual that said if a pilot weighed more than 200 pounds he would be disqualified to fly because the ejection seat capability would handle only up to that weight. We were close enough that we felt with a few extra burgers from the fat locker we could exceed the weight, especially with our flight gear on and we would then be able watch the action from the comfort of a soft chair. Upon sharing this discovery with Cdr Morin, we were promptly informed that he would issue a wavier so we could continue and then upon arrival in the US, we would be grounded until further notice, or until we got our weight down.

On the night before our last mission prior to heading back to the states, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) target planners came up with a real beauty. It was some truck park in a very inaccessible place and had “die hop” written all over it. We were all fatigued by this point and I went down to Morin’s room and blew up about what an unfair deal this was and why didn’t someone else get this mission. After all, we had been out here for what seemed an eternity. We all had more than 100 trips into North Vietnam, blah blah blah. He looked at me with that cockeyed Boston grin and said “look I have a wife and four kids and you are a young man. Wouldn’t it be better if you died than me?” I said Skipper I had never looked at it that way and I apologize for being so narcissistic.

About a month after we got back to the states, the Skipper called me into his office and said the Navy had decided that some of the guys were going to be rotated to the east coast for combat equalization reasons. He told me that I was going to be one of those guys. He told me how proud he was to have had me as a member of the Foxes, and he wished me the best in my new

billet. I just sat there for a while and contemplated what he had said. Lack of something to say was not a common event for me but at that moment I was speechless. When I walked out of his office, I had tears in my eyes. Such a countenance was clearly not becoming a young carrier combat pilot full of swagger.

In the years since we served together, the bond between the “squadronmates” of VA-155 remains stronger than most family ties. I know this is not uncommon with people who have shared this type of experience and it is well documented in many books and stories. What, in my opinion, makes this tale unique is the quality of the man who led us. He has now been my friend for many years, and I consider the things he did during that year we served together to have had a greater influence on how I lived my subsequent life than my experiences with my own father. Incidentally, he did make two stars in the Navy and retired after more than thirty years of service.

I know that since leaving the Navy, Jim Morin has never been far from my consciousness.



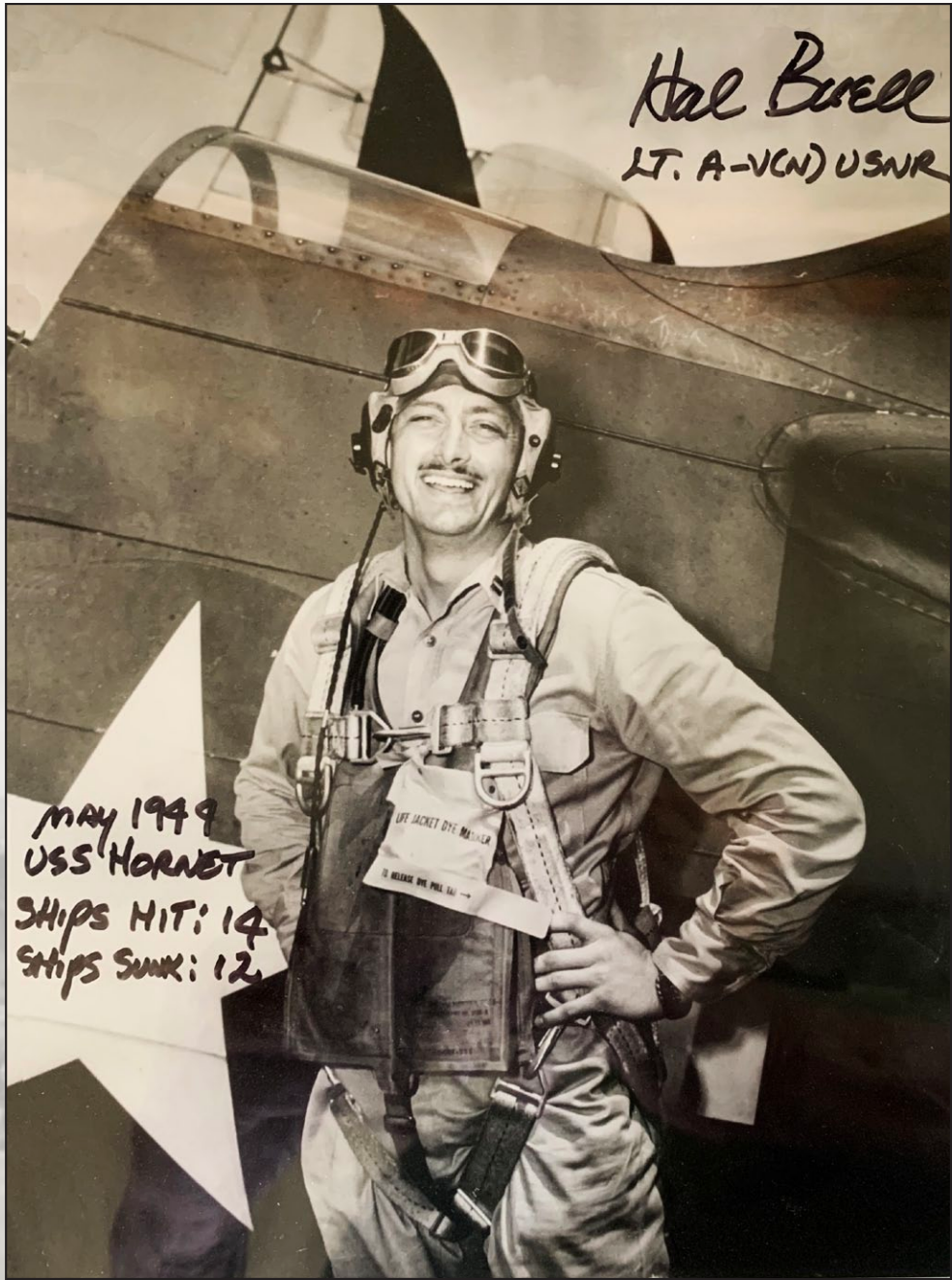
Jim Morin (US Navy)

Light Attack Forefathers—Hal Buell

By Dave Dollarhide

Our Light Attack Skyhawk culture didn't begin with the jet age, or Vietnam, but has deep roots from people of the distant past with their innovation, dedication and courage. Many books have documented it all, but how often does one have an opportunity to actually spend quality time with a WWII hero talking about the "Cactus Air Force" and much more?

That wonderful day came our way in 2006, when Claude Caviness, former Commanding Officer of VA-741 (A-4s) and personal friend came by our hangar on a grass strip south of Jacksonville, FL in company with Harold "Hal" Buell, famous SBD Dauntless and SBD2C Helldiver pilot from the war torn Pacific. With a few back to back deployments aboard Yorktown, Saratoga, Enterprise, Hornet and ground operations from Henderson Field, Hal amassed more actual combat time than any other dive bomb pilot in the Pacific War. He participated in sixteen battles, raids and invasions.



Hal Buell Hornet 1944.

He was decorated over twenty times, to include the Navy Cross, Silver Star, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Purple Hearts and other unit commendations and citations. "Ships hit: 14, Ships sunk: 12," as noted on this 1944 photo of him on the USS Hornet's flight deck.

It was May 8, when Pat Lee and I met with them in our hangar's "Ready Room" and enjoyed a delightful and educational afternoon. Hal could recall all kinds of details on tactics and the SBDs and was interested in knowing about our RV "homebuilts". We offered to give them both rides, but with humorous overtones, they both blamed direct orders from the "homefront" for turning us down. In turn, we launched from our grass strip to show them a few formation passes around the "patch" and it was a fitting end to our day of Naval Aviation comradeship.

In turn, Hal sent us a beautiful lithograph of a Hell Diver and story of his career, along with the USS Hornet photo above. Later, he sent a short piece he'd written called *The Ready Room*, which we framed and mounted next to the entrance of our "geezer" version of a Navy ready room.

Let it be known that Attack Pilots remain the same throughout the ages.

The Ready Room

The Ready Room is a special place aboard Naval aircraft carriers where the pilots assemble to prepare themselves for flights from the ship's deck. When flight quarters is sounded, all pilots go to the Ready Room "on the double." Here they dress in flight gear, prepare for combat if in war time, are briefed for the mission, develop their flight plans, and wait for launch orders from higher authority.

The Ready Room is a place of comradeship, of close friendliness and, to a certain extent, of unspoken fear. For it is from here that every pilot departs to man his aircraft for flight, including those whom fate decrees will not return. It is each pilot's last point of intimate contact with his shipmates, and the surface world, before he enters that other foreign world of flight in space; it is his first place of refuge when he returns.

This Ready Room is dedicated to the memory of all those gallant aviators wearing Wings of Gold--tailhookers who left the decks of aircraft carriers to do battle with the enemies of their country, or simply to fly to fame and glory--and did not return. God bless and keep them each and every one.

Hal Buell
---Harold L. Buell



Hide, Hal Buell, and Bonzo.

MAN ON A MISSILE:

• Blue Angels Fly the A-4 •



By Nicholas A. Veronico, with photos by Gary Verver.

After the tragic 1973 season, the Blue Angels were floundering. Ken Wallace, 1954–55 slot pilot and 1961–63 team leader, was called upon to guide the team through rough waters. Wallace was serving in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations as the tactical air plans officer. “Because of my past association with the Blue Angels, whenever anything that concerned them came up, I was rung in on it in some way,” he said. “When we changed leaders [after Bently’s accident], there was a lot of talk about putting a lieutenant commander in there. I was all for that. I knew Skip Umstead and I knew his capabilities. I strongly urged them to put him in there. Later, he was involved in the accident at Lakehurst in which he was killed.

“In the view of the Secretary of the Navy, that was almost the straw that broke the camel’s back,” Wallace recalled. “He

was not fully supportive of keeping the team. Admiral Zumwalt, who was CNO and not an aviator, was very much insistent on keeping the team in business. So he and I went to chat with the Secretary of the Navy. The secretary agreed to keep it in business, but we had to change airplanes. He would not let us continue with the F-4s—partially due to the crashes, and at this point we were in the fuel crunch of the mid-1970s. The F-4 is not an economical airplane on fuel, and it is a heavy maintenance airplane. It was just a little bit too visible for the times.”

Selecting a New Aircraft

Given the job of program manager for the Blue Angels, Wallace had his work cut out for him. Drawing on his previous experience with the team, he would implement many far-reaching changes. “I started casting about for a different

airplane. The airplane that I really wanted was the F-14,” he said. “I did not want an F-14 with all the weapons control systems in it; that was wasteful.” After proposing his idea to Grumman, they decided that it would cost more to make an airplane without the systems than it would to make one with them. Cost became the determining factor, and the F-14 idea went by the wayside.

For Wallace, the A-7 was the next logical choice. He said, “There simply were not enough airplanes in the pipeline to let us have them. The fleet needed the A-7 desperately and could not divert seven aircraft for our use. I went down to Chance

Vought and flew the airplane and it certainly would have been quite suitable.”

Although it had been looked at by a number of team leaders in the past, Wallace once again considered the McDonnell Douglas A-4 *Skyhawk*.

“The A-4 was about the only fleet airplane left that was anywhere near usable by the team,” he said. “It just so happened that while we were doing this search for airplanes, a couple of squadrons were coming back from Vietnam and were being decommissioned. They had the A-4F, which was the latest model at that time. They also had the latest engine, the P-408. It had more thrust than any of the previous engines the A-4 had used.

“We got together with the engineers at McDonnell Douglas and with some of the people at Naval Air Systems Command. We needed some changes to the control system. We needed more nose down force. Traditionally, the Blue Angels fly the airplane, regardless of the model, with full down nose trim. It gives us, in some cases, 40 pounds of nose down stick force. We want that nose down force so we’ve got something we are putting pressure against all the time. Plus, in rough air it tends to make you bounce away from the formation rather than up into the airplanes ahead of you. By bracing our right forearms on our leg or knee, it provides a very stable or firm base to control the airplane with the stick. By just flexing your wrist a little bit, rather than having large magnitude arm movements, you get your control that way. The engineers at McDonnell Douglas came up with a bungee cord arrangement that modified the bell crank assemblies in the airplane, thus providing the nose down force.

“We also bolted up the leading edge slats. The A-4 in its normal configuration has aerodynamic slats on the leading edges of the wings. They are actuated by aerodynamic force and are used in heavy g-loads or accelerations. They increase the camber of the wing so that you get more lift. The problem with those aerodynamic slats is that depending on the condition of flight, if you’re not exactly in balanced flight or if you are in a turn, one slat may not come out and the other may fully deploy. It really depends on the air loads. If they come out asymmetrically, they can pop you right on your back faster than you can think about it. We determined that by bolting them up, we would not add to the landing speed of the airplane by any significant amount.

“We took the guns out, some armor plating, added a drag chute for operations from shorter airports, and added weight to the nose for balance. The overall weight

reduction was significant. We ended up with an airplane that weighed 11,300 pounds [dry] and we had an engine that produced 11,400 pounds thrust. When you got down to a light fuel load, you could do some pretty cute tricks with that little airplane. The roll rate would certainly not spin your head, but it was more than enough for what we wanted to do in the air show.”

Making the Team a Real Squadron

While Wallace was in the process of selecting an aircraft and making the necessary modifications, he was busy making other changes. “If an aviator came to the Blue Angels as a commander and spent two years there, because of the timing of things, most likely he was also at the point in his career when he was going to be selected for squadron command. If his contemporaries were getting their squadrons and he was down here as head of the

Blue Angels, it was penalizing him. That was one of the prime reasons for making it a squadron, so that he would be able to count it as having a squadron command for his tour with the Blues.

“It also made the Blue Angels eligible for the full complement of squadron personnel. I did not choose to go that route. I wanted to keep it very austere and very small,” recalls Wallace. “Instead of the full A-4 complement of enlisted personnel, we took only sixty-three. That is less than half what the normal squadron would get. We only took seven A-4Fs, plus the TA-4, when a squadron’s normal aircraft complement would have been twelve. What it also did was to open up the supply channels to us a little bit. We no longer had to go to several sources to get parts.

“We could have had a lot more ground support officers, but I wanted to keep that at a minimum also. I kept the people who were already on board in those billets.

continued...



Blue Angels 5 and 6 pass at mid-field.



Opposing solos practice at winter training in El Centro.

Blue Angel Boeing/McDonnell Douglas A-4 Skyhawks

Specifications

Length.....	40 feet, 1.5 inches
Wingspan.....	27 feet, 6 inches
Wing Area.....	260 square feet
Height.....	15 feet, 2 inches
Maximum Takeoff weight.....	24,500
Powerplant.....	Pratt & Whitney J-52-P-408
Thrust.....	11,200 pounds
Maximum Speed	670 miles per hour
Ceiling	38,700 feet

“They had already made a selection for the leader. I took the people who were left on the team, there were only a couple of them, and I selected the remainder. Most of the people on the team had never flown the A-4 before, so we were busy training those people. The new leader [CDR Tony Less] was deployed at the time. When he came on board, I went out and flew with him.”

The Blue Angels held their commissioning ceremony on December 10, 1973, at Pensacola. Vice Admiral Jerry Miller, former Sixth Fleet Commander, was the guest speaker, and McDonnell Douglas presented the squadron with a painting for its ready room. At the commissioning ceremonies, only one aircraft had been painted into the team’s colors, the two-seat TA-4J. This plane served as the backdrop for the ceremony.

After officially becoming a squadron, the team continued to train for an additional four weeks at Pensacola. They then moved to their winter home at El Centro for a full training cycle. Ken Wallace stayed onboard until August, 1974. Once everyone was trained and on the road, he felt things were going well. “I considered that I had done what I set out to do, so I moved on.” Wallace retired from the Navy after successfully guiding the Blue Angels through their lowest point.

Getting the House in Order

CDR Less was the Blue Angels first commander to have had a previous squadron command. He implemented additional changes to the squadron while in training. A flight surgeon was added “who was able to be a confidant of the commanding officer and respond to personality issues and changes,” Less said. “I think that was extremely beneficial. My relationship with the flight surgeon was good, and his was good with the rest of the team members, too. But by the same token, he was able to put his finger on any little problems that might be coming up. When you are flying that close together, operating that close together, and living that close together for so long a period in the team environment, you need a guy like that.”

Prior to the team becoming a squadron, paperwork was, as always, a nightmare. Some years the team had an administration officer and some years they did not. It was sporadic. The officer in charge spent many hours shuffling routine paperwork that could have been handled by a subordinate officer. Under the squadron organization, Less was able to have a permanent administration officer assigned.



On the beach. The Blue Angel delta formation at low level.

Another challenge was maintaining morale and camaraderie. Before the team became a squadron, everyone except the pilots, the narrator, and the public affairs officer was excluded from being a Blue Angel. “When we went to a squadron, we made sure that everyone understood that they were all Blue Angels,” Less said. It added to the cohesiveness of the group. Prior to 1973, the support personnel considered themselves just support personnel. That was a major flaw that we had to overcome.”

Skyhawks Return to the Air, Cautiously

CDR Less put the squadron through its paces at El Centro, flying twice a day, seven days a week, for two months. While training and rebuilding the squadron, the lessons learned by earlier teams were never far from this squadron’s mind. “We realized that if we had an accident it would probably mean the demise of the organization,” Less said. “So we approached the show season in a mode wherein we were certainly going

to be aggressive, to practice perfection, but we were going to do basic maneuvers. I think the first year we worked ourselves into a routine that the airplane was capable of, and then the following years, more maneuvers got put in.” Using caution as his guide, Less kept the Farvel out of the show until mid-1974. He also kept the solos from doing opposing rolls, in which both aircraft roll toward each other.

“After we had gotten through the first year with no accidents, and we felt confident with the airplane and ourselves, we began to add a few more maneuvers,” Less said. “We went to a five-plane *fleur-de-lis* and a five-plane line abreast loop. We just started making things a little more aggressive. We tried to get maneuvers back a little bit tighter, reversals a little bit tighter. You can do that with a second-year team and a second-year boss as well. As K. C. Jones came on, some of the same team members were with him. They went to the double Farvel, where the leader and the slot are inverted while

the wingmen are right side up. They changed some of the solo maneuvers to where they were doing more outside stuff, such as negative-g push-outs.

“I think our first year’s philosophy was: ‘Let’s get through this first year with good solid airmanship and good solid maneuvers,’” Less continued. “You are able to get a good tight show, have a maneuver in front of the crowd at all times, I think that’s what we did. We went at it with aggressiveness; but again, we minimized the risk factor. It continued to grow after that. We got through the first two years without losing anyone.”

Thankfully, the rebuilding process and show seasons had been safe. Small incidents that could have turned out for the worse, had it not been for superior airmanship, did crop up now and then. Vance Parker was practicing at El Centro when one of his wings gave way. Parker had fuel in the wing and was doing vertical rolls. “He was practicing full aileron deflection rolls and got the airplane rolling so fast that he popped some rivets

in the wing while going straight up. The speed of that roll was such that it put fuel to the outer extension of the wing. The hydraulic pressure of the fuel split the wing apart because of the centrifugal force from that roll. After that maneuver, his plane was leaking and his fuel gauge was going down. He put it back on deck OK, but we had to get a new wing for that airplane. We had never experienced this before, and clearly McDonnell Douglas never had either,” Less said.

To prevent this from happening during an air show, Less had to limit the solo pilots to three-quarter stick deflection rolls after the incident.

Show Types Get Names

The team came equipped with three new tools for the 1974 show season. They had developed, or given names to, the “high” show, the “low-rolling” show, and the “flat” show. “Teams in the past had been doing that sort of thing, I just don’t think they called it by those names,” Less said. “We decided that with the A-4 airplane, we were certainly able to do a straight flat show if the weather met VFR

[Visual Flight Rules] standards [1,000-foot ceiling with 3-mile visibility underneath the cloud cover]. Then there were times when we would perform a rolling show. In the rolling show, we needed to have about 3,500 feet to do the rolls underneath the clouds. We topped out on the delta roll a little higher than the diamond roll. You could take a diamond around just a little bit faster. With the six planes you wanted to make sure that you were not whipping too hard for those guys on the back corners. About 3,500 feet kept us from creeping into the clouds.” When there were clear skies with unlimited visibility, the team would fly their standard “high” show.

Performance Highlights

The first performance for the public with the new A-4 *Skyhawk* was at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, on May 18, 1974. Just under two years later, Less turned the squadron over to CDR “Casey” Jones on January 9, 1976. Jones would lead the team through the year-long bicentennial celebrations. In the spring of that year, the team flew outside the United States for audiences at Naval

Air Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, and Abbotsford, Moose Jaw, and Saskatchewan, Canada. While on the road, the team’s winter home was renamed by the Navy. Naval Air Station El Centro became the National Parachute Test Range, or NPTR El Centro. And on July 4, the team performed for record crowds at Naval Air Station Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, where they flew with the Canadian Snowbirds flight demonstration team.

At the end of the following year, December 1977, Jones turned the squadron over to CDR Bill Newman. Under Newman, the first enlisted female joined the squadron. Aviation Electrician’s Mate Penny Edwards became the first in a long line of women who have joined the ranks as Blue Angels technicians.

While preparing for the last show of the 1978 season, Lieutenant Mike Curtin, opposing solo, was lost at Naval Air Station Miramar. Curtin was performing a high-speed rolling pass down the flight line when he struck the runway. This tragic incident was the first loss of a *Skyhawk* aircrew member.



A perfect Blue Angel diamond in mid-roll.



The Diamond landing maneuver, just prior to touchdown.



Blues 1975 team.

The End of the A-4 Era

On July 13, 1985, at the Niagara Falls Airport, two A-4s collided in mid-air during a performance. Two solos, LCDR Robert M. Gershon and LT Anthony P. Caputi, had just completed a low opposing pass, then they rolled inverted, and pushed up into a half Cuban eight. The wing and fuselage of Gershon's aircraft struck the tail of Caputi's. Caputi was able to eject, but Gershon perished, unable to get out of the stricken *Skyhawk*.

This unfortunate accident accelerated the examination of the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 *Hornet* for use by the team. Navy officials had been considering the change for at least a month prior to the accident. The team completed the 1985 show season, albeit with only one solo, and converted to the F/A-18 during the winter training session for the 1986 season.

CDR Less summed up the Blue Angels A-4 experience, "The A-4 lasted for thirteen years in the demonstration environment. In my estimation it was the best airplane—I thought it looked great, and it was very maneuverable. You were able to keep the tops of your loops in the 6,500- to 6,800-foot range, reversals were tighter, and you could keep airplanes in front of the crowd consistently. The A-4 shows did not have gaps. It was a nice performing airplane."

Ed. Note: this article was originally printed as Chapter Seven in The Blue Angels: A Fly-by History by Nicholas Veronico (2008). Special thanks to Zenith Press for permission to use this excerpt. This book is an excellent survey of the Blue Angels over the year and is highly recommended for any Blue Angel enthusiast.

8 Thuds and a Scooter

By Frank Tullo

During “Rolling Thunder,” (the bombing campaign over North Vietnam), the only USAF types that Skyhawk pilots would talk to without sneering were the F-105 Thunderchief “Thud” drivers. Frank Tullo was one who wrote up his memories, (presented here slightly abridged and edited by Boom Powell), of a joint Navy/Air Force hunter-killer mission to knock out SAM sites near Hanoi on October 31, 1965. The two services flew several such combined operations in an attempt to deal with the burgeoning SAM threat. The Navy Skyhawks had ECM equipment the Air Force did not have--yet.

One day our base commander, a colonel who did not fly combat missions, bravely announced: “We” are going after the SAMs. Capt Mike Cooper, showing more guts than tact, called out from the back of the room, “What’s this ‘we’ crap, Colonel, are you going along in the F105F two-seater?” Getting shot at everyday tends to loosen up one’s military decorum.

Navy LtCdr Powers landed his A4E at Takhli carrying his own 500 lb bombs. Powers was the XO of the USS *Oriskany*’s VA-164 squadron. (Ed: Trent Powers was the OpsO.) The Navy had sent their very best. Powers knew this was a big time White House directed mission and dangerous.

Takhli scheduled two outstanding flight commanders for the flight of eight F-105s. Each Thud would carry 8x750 lb. bombs. This was in the days before “smart” and “dumb” bombs.

This joint Navy/Air Force mission briefing was more like a focus group. Powers wanted to fly across the target level at 50 feet and skip bomb it. We preferred to dive bomb, using a pop-up from the deck to create a dive bomb run. No sweat, since Powers would be first across the target and out of the way, his flat pass would not conflict with our dive-bombing.

These were called “Doom’s Day missions,” because invariably someone got shot down from the heavy defenses

around Hanoi. Did guys shy away from these missions? Are you kidding? Your best friend would lie, cheat and screw you to get your slot on a Doom’s Day mission.

Powers’ plane had a magic black box, well, what passed for magic, *circa* 1965. Actually, it was similar to the old coffee grinder ADF (Direction Finder). A needle would point in the general direction of a SAM site, when and if the SAM was in the SEARCH mode. Operator skill was required.

We launched, joined up, refueled and headed North only to find a solid overcast at the let down point. It was a No-Go. Or was it? Powers pulled the Thuds into a tight nine-ship Vee formation and descended into cloud. No one would have



criticized him one bit if he canceled for weather and returned to base. He pressed on.

Nearing the target, we finally broke out of cloud and went to the deck. No longer a formation now, just a gaggle of bomb-laden Thuds strung out in loose single file. At one point, there were hills on both sides and overcast above, making a sort of tunnel. I got slung into clouds during a turn and immediately punched the nose down desperately hoping for valley beneath and not hillside. I remember thinking; I’m *not* going to miss this mission for anything. I flew so low over a guy driving a farm tractor that he leapt to the ground. He was doin’ about two knots, we were doin’ 550. When they are shooting at you: Low is good...Fast is good.

My plane was hit by small arms fire causing some yellow caution lights to glow, as we screamed low level towards the target.

The Thud was well built. Once, when all the 105s were grounded due to several inexplicably blowing up, someone suggested giving them to the Army for use as tank crushers. Taxi a Thud over a tank and collapse the gear...crushing the tank. Another joke was Republic was going to make the Thud out of cement, but they found out steel was heavier.

We didn’t know the SAM’s exact location, but hoped the Navy’s magic black box could point the way. We were the goats, tethered to lure the lion out into the open for the kill. Until that day, it was a big deal when just one or two SAMs were launched. Now they were firing SAMs like artillery. Fifteen is the number I remember. (Ed: 27 overall)

Powers calmly transmitted, “I’ve got ‘em on my nose...starting my run.” He flew directly over the target at tree-top level and was literally disintegrated by withering ground fire.

My turn. I lit the burner and popped up to about 7500 feet, Power’s emergency



VA-164 A-4s from USS Oriskany

locator beacon screeching in my headset. As the nose came up, I clearly remember saying aloud to myself, “Oh crap, I don’t want to do this.”

The anti-aircraft hits caused multiple red and yellow emergency lights to blink incessantly. I transmitted my intention to get to the water off Haiphong before ejecting.

Alone and doing 810 knots on the deck (that’s right, Buddy, 810 knots) I slowly overtook a Navy F-8 *Crusader* as if passing a car on the freeway. We exchanged gentle pathetic waves as if to say: “Oh, Hi there, don’t know you, but hope you’re having a nice day?” I swear it was the most surreal moment of my life.

Still on the deck, but now over the safety of Gulf of Tonkin water, a sort of euphoric invincibility set in. If I ejected over the water, the Navy would surely pick me up.

Decided there was no reason to jump out if this bird was still running. Did that last month and it scared the crap out of me. On the radio now, with precious little fuel remaining, I was begging for a tanker. Made radio contact with a KC-135 somewhere in cyberspace. Following a terse debate challenging *his* priorities, we got together with barely any fuel reading on my gauge.

Back at Takhli, I pleaded with the

base commander to award Powers the Air Force Cross. He didn’t like the idea. Reminded me that the Navy had their own Navy Cross and handled their own decorations. I pushed my point as if we were equals. Don’t you get it--the USS *Oriskany* lost their top guy while USAF gets a big headline back home. Powers’ brilliant leadership was why the mission succeeded! Give the NAVY guy the AIR FORCE CROSS! The colonel wasn’t a fighter pilot. He didn’t get it.

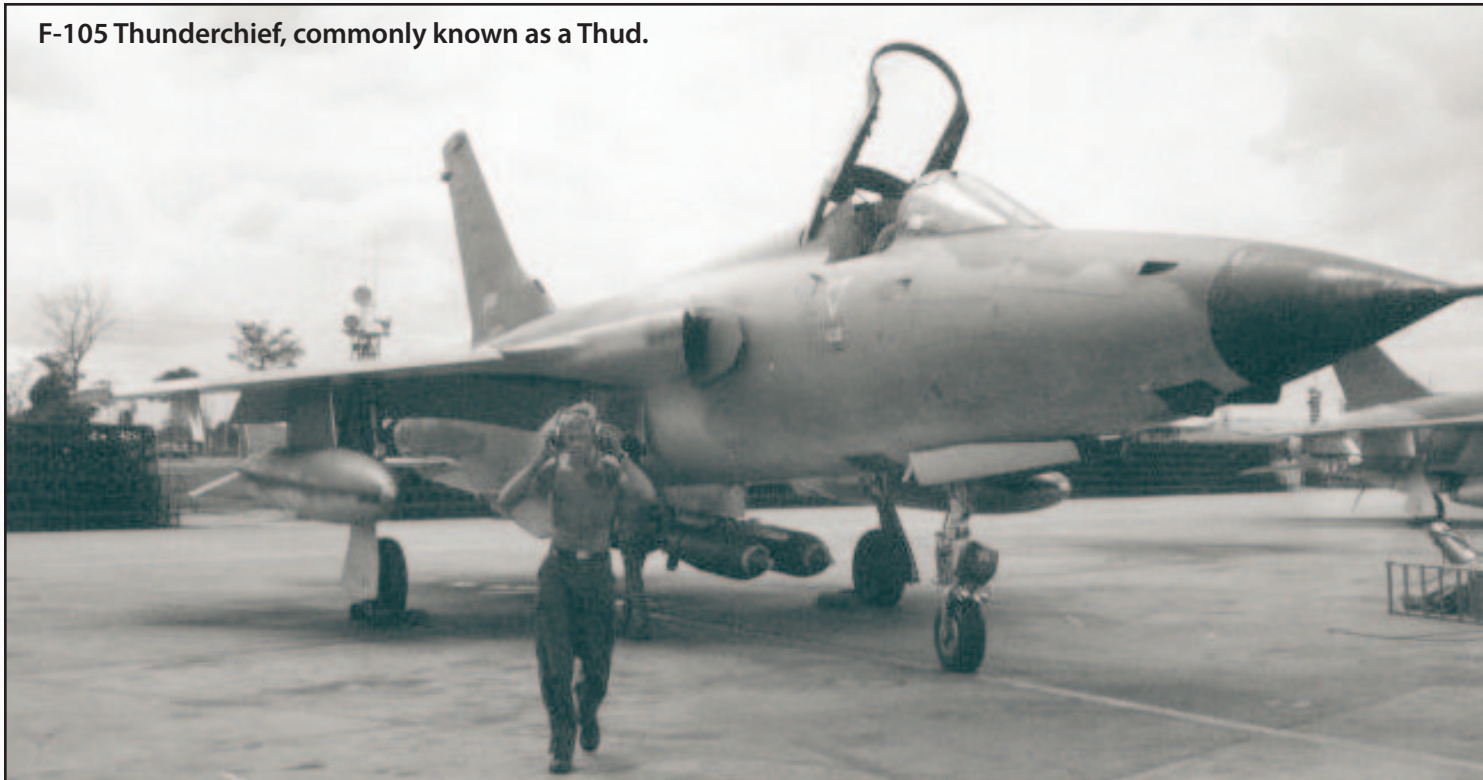
Gen George Simler flew in from headquarters to have a beer with the guys on the mission. Sitting at the sorry-no-ice-today, O’Club bar, Simler and I were hangar flying like two young cadets. He was that kind of general.

I passionately pitched Simler on awarding the Air Force Cross to Powers. He loved it... instantly. He turned and said dismissively to the base commander, “Take care of that, Colonel.”

Trent Richard Powers was awarded the Navy Cross. The citation is on www.skyhawk.org. He survived the ejection and was captured. His death while a POW was under mysterious circumstances.

The strike was a total of 65 aircraft on a bridge five miles from the Kep MiG base. Powers was flying A-4E 151173 AH466 of VA-164 when he was shot down.

F-105 Thunderchief, commonly known as a Thud.



REDEMPTION

The first day of November 1966 was to be one of the worst days ever in the life of Allan (“Soapy”) Carpenter. Soapy was a dear friend and squadron mate, and we were flying A-4 Skyhawks from the deck of the USS *F.D. Roosevelt*. It was during one of the hottest phases of the shooting war in the skies over North Vietnam.

On this day, he led a flight of three aircraft with Rob Winslow (not his real name) and Terry Thies as wingman. The mission was to provide armed support for a photo-reconnaissance mission over Haiphong harbor flown by two RF-8 Crusaders. The Crusaders were no sooner in their photo run when they were attacked by surface-to-air missiles and they screamed for help! Soapy and his flight immediately moved in and engaged the site among, “a Hell of a lot of flak” including some mean stuff that carpeted the whole area. Then it happened – oh God! – a muffled explosion, Soapy’s aircraft yawed a bit and the fire warning light started flashing! Better head for the water! Smoke! Wingmen screaming at him to get out! Time for that awful decision – eject and become a POW – or stay with a burning airplane and try to make it to the precious blue water that Naval Aviators love so much! Oh-oh, oxygen just went off, cockpit went dark, stick is in cement like a parking meter! The airplane is out of control and heading downhill at more than 600mph! Soapy reaches for the ejection handle and – whoosh – he’s hanging from a parachute and he is OVER WATER.

Rob and Terry were elated to see the parachute at last – and it was coming down over the water. It wasn’t going to splash down in blue water, which would be best, but the muddy water of the upper reaches of the Tonkin Gulf would do. Or would it? There were all kinds of fishing boats in the area, and clearly, they had Al Carpenter’s parachute in sight also. In fact, they were converging on his ‘chute like bears to honey!

Damn!

Rob and Terry rechecked their bomb racks – they had nothing! In desperation, they began a series of low passes over the fishing boats, hoping to hold them off until Navy rescue units could arrive! When there was no ordnance fired during the initial passes, the fishing boats picked up the message pretty fast – these aircraft had no ammunition! Within a few minutes, Al was seen being pulled into a fishing boat which then rushed toward

shore. It was the last time friendly eyes would see him for more than six years.

There is one more disturbing element to this story. When Rob Winslow trapped aboard the carrier and post-flighted his aircraft, he discovered to his astonishment that he had two 500-lb bombs left on his racks! They were in plain sight! Shit! Somehow, during all the excitement, he had screwed up royally – and because of his screw up, Al Carpenter was now in all probability injured, and was presently undergoing the misery of becoming a prisoner of war. Oh God – what is going to happen to Al? And what about his family? Carolyn, his wife and high school sweet-heart, would be devastated. That’s not to mention 7 year-old April, 5 year-old Wendy, 3 year-old Mark and the new baby, Kelly. Navy rescue helicopters had been on their way, with fighter escorts armed to the teeth; Soapy could have been rescued. Any reasonable person would conclude that his two 500 pounders could have made the difference. Rob Winslow was one miserable guy, and he would have years to think about it.

In February, 1973, following more than six years of torture and misery at the hands of the North Vietnamese, Allan Carpenter was flown from Hanoi to Clark AFB in the Philippines as part of Operation Homecoming – thank God he was free at last!

The Blue Hawks of Attack Squadron 72 scattered to the winds following the war, and it was to be 25 years after Al’s shootdown that the first Blue Hawk Reunion would occur in 1991. It was hosted by Al and Carolyn Carpenter themselves, who had carved out a comfortable retirement along an obscure inlet off the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. It was a beautiful setting, and it seemed that most of the combat ‘Hawks were there.

Among the attendees was Rob Winslow.

Following the dinner that Saturday night, and following the wine and drinks and conviviality, people gravitated to the comfort of Al’s living room, where there was a quiet ebb and flow of conversation. The atmosphere became more circumspect, as I think we all became immersed in the reality of how fortunate we were to have life, and yes – to have each other. It was then that I noticed that Rob had worked his way to the couch, where he now faced Al Carpenter. At that point, I don’t think anyone sensed the significance of the situation,

but I was watching Rob, and I saw anxiety, even grief, written all over his face. He began speaking to Al, or perhaps pleading with Al. It was then that a hush fell over the room, and all eyes turned to the encounter, and everyone became immediately aware of what was transpiring. Rob was now quietly in tears, as he did his best to stumble through what he must have rehearsed for years. He was so sorry, he said. Every word came with great difficulty, as he struggled mightily with his composure. He could never atone for the damage he had done, he sobbed, to Al and his family, or for the ...

By now, there were no dry eyes in the room as Al reached over, put his hand on Rob’s shoulder and stopped him in mid-sentence. With his eyes seeming to stare into Rob’s soul, he said in a gentle voice, “Rob ... Rob, if you had dropped those bombs, I wouldn’t be here now. I ejected at more than 600 mph, remember? Both my arms were torn from their sockets and dislocated by the blast of the airstream. When I hit the water, I couldn’t get rid of my ‘chute – I couldn’t do anything! The pain was almost unbearable! I bobbed up and down in the water like a cork, taking on water every time I bobbed under. I was gagging and miserable! My ‘chute was sinking, and would soon take me with it; I could see it coming, but there was not a damn thing I could do about it! The ‘chute started to tug real hard, and I was barely able to keep my face above the surface for a few final gulps of air. It was then that a hand grabbed my harness from the rear and hauled me into a boat. I was saved! I was alive! If you had dropped your bombs and scared the fishermen away, I’d be dead.”

To be honest, that was more than 25 years ago and I don’t remember what happened next – but it had to involve at least a thousand pounds of guilt rising off the shoulders of Rob Winslow and vanishing into the ether. Rob and Soapy are friends to this day, and see each other regularly at Blue Hawk reunions. Nor do any combat Blue Hawks condemn Rob for what we all knew was his colossal error. It was the fog of war, and at one time or another, it has affected us all. Even in the ugliness of war – sometimes there is the awesome magnificence of redemption.

-- D.D. Smith, *“Above Average – Naval Aviation the Hard Way.”* Now available on Amazon

Chu Lai 66—More Jarhead BS

I'm reminded of two stories that happened at Chu Lai in the summer of 1966. Then there was only the expeditionary airfield of 4,000 feet of shifting metal. All takeoffs were with JATO bottles (lots of things went wrong with those — especially at night) and all landings were arrested.

One day we taxied in to VMA-223 from a mission and noticed an Air Force C-123 parked at the main ramp that had made an emergency landing at Chu Lai. That night at the club, the only passenger from the C-123 was there. He was a F-100 pilot in his flight suit on crutches and with two broken legs. Of course, we wanted to know how he broke his legs. He told us that he was a F-100F (two-seater) Misty Fast FAC. The pilots took turns flying front and back seat. He said that it was his day to go up North in the back seat. They found the target for the F-105s and marked it with 5-in. WP rockets. Then, after the -105s were done, they were supposed to fly low and fast and take an after-action picture of the target. The back-seater was the guy with the hand-held camera. Of course, the NVA knew the routine and began shooting the crap out of them. The front seat guy did a lot of jinking and somehow, the lens came off the camera and disappeared. They got feet wet safely and in-flight refueled for their return trip home, down south to Tuy Hoa (or wherever). Our guy said that he kept looking for the lens, but the front-seater said to forget it. They would find it after landing.



Crewmen position a VMA-311 A-4E on the SATS catapult at Chu Lai in June 1968. (Photo via Peter Mersky).

Upon landing and while taxiing in, the front seater called “canopy clear” and raised the canopy. The lens cover had landed near one of the actuators for the ejection seat. The pilot said that he heard this tremendous explosion and realized what had happened when he got seat separation about 250 feet up at the top of the arc and saw a miniature F-100 below him missing a canopy. He said that it was like a Wily Coyote cartoon. There was a point where you stop going up, a pause, and then a rapid going down thing. The F-100 didn't have a zero/zero seat (it needed 100 kts and 100 feet). So, he said that he had always heard that in a long fall, one dies of a heart attack before one hits the ground. So, he said he kept shouting: “Come on heart attack.” The drogue chute had deployed and that kept his feet straight down. The ground was very steep near the taxiway. They had been doing a lot of excavating, and it had rained. The pilot hit feet first. The undeployed chute saved his back and kept it straight. He skidded down the embankment into a large pool of water. He had two simple fractures. Needless to say, he couldn't buy another drink that night.

continued...

The second story is the single funniest thing that I have ever seen. It was around September 1966, and they had just completed the installation of the land catapult (Oh good — no more JATO). We had operated out of there for about three weeks with the land cat, and it worked great. Anyway, there was to be a change of command for Marine Aircraft Group 12. Col. Les Brown was about to hand over MAG-12 to the great, one and only Jay Hubbard. The change of command ceremony was to coincide with the official inauguration of the first operational combat tactical SATS (Short Airfield Tactical Support) in the history of the Marine Corps. It was a real dog and pony show. The guests of honor were the Secretary of the Navy, FMFPAC LtGen Krulak, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing Commander, MGen Robinshaw (a great guy by the way — he always flew with 223 and was the world's best wingman because he could hardly see). All pilots not flying were to put on their dungarees for a formation in the sand to participate in the change of command. The program then called for all troops to fall out and observe four A-4s to be launched from the land cat. That was the planned program.

Someone (no one would admit who) suggested the day before that two F-4 Phantoms be brought in the night before to be launched after the A-4s. Now wasn't that a great idea? Well, of course, with a 4,000-foot strip and 50-foot-wide taxiways, no F-4s had ever been to Chu Lai. So, in the late afternoon the day before the ceremony, two F-4s landed and took the arresting gear. They folded their wings and proceeded to very carefully taxi into the biggest two revetments. And, of course, the familiar F-4 engine wailing sound followed them everywhere.

That night there was much harassment of the F-4 crews in the club about flying an aircraft that needed a committee to perform (two seats instead of one). Furthermore, we took to calling the RIOs (backseat guys) "hare-lipped dogs" because their only job was to shout "Mark Mark" when the pilot reached bomb release altitude.

Anyway, the next day those of us not on the flight schedule put on our dungarees and fell in for the ceremony. VMA-123 was led by the world's greatest squadron commander and my personal hero to this day, LtCol Bob Sinclair (I was the world's saltiest 2ndLt at the time with 125 combat missions and was assigned as Col Bob's wingman).

The ceremony went off without a hitch and Jay Hubbard was now our new Group skipper. The dignitaries lined up on the high ground (read sand dune here) with SecNav on the right then FMFPAC "The Brute" General Krulak, then Gen Robinshaw, then the old Group CO, Les Brown and finally Jay Hubbard. Sure enough, they launched four bomb laden A-4s off the land cat. This was ho hum stuff for us because we had been doing it for three weeks already. Next the first F-4 taxied up with folded wings. The distinctive two F-4 engines were doing a lot of wailing. Up went the F-4's nosewheel onto the dolly. The wings were extended and locked. The nosewheel was attached to the dolly with the frangible metal breakaways. The hold-back for the tail was installed. All was ready for the run-up. The two F-4 engines were run-up to 100 percent. Man, there was something in this show for everyone. Tremendous noise from four jet engines, dust and smoke. Nothing could go wrong now.

The Cat Officer received the salute from the F-4 pilot and dropped his hand. BOOM! the cat fired. BOOM! BOOM! both F-4 engines went into afterburner. Now about 60,000 pounds of F-4 and

bombs are hurtling down the 1,500-foot cat track. At this point I must interject a minor technical point about the frangible metal devices holding the F-4's nosewheel to the dolly — well, you see, they break away at the end of the 1,500-foot cat ride. This, of course, is not a problem for an A-4 because it has a long nosewheel and sits up at a pronounced angle. Unfortunately, the F-4 sits parallel to the ground. In order to not make this too technical, both nosewheel frangible devices did what they were supposed to and broke off. One went into the left intake and one went into the right intake. This was problematic for the Phantom. BOOM! the left engine exploded. BOOM! the right engine exploded. The show got much better. Flaming metal parts and discs slicing through the side of the F-4. Then total involvement of flames of the aircraft from the intakes back. BOOM! went the ejection seat of the back-seater. BOOM! went the ejection seat of the front-seater. And KABOOM! went the F-4 into the sand southeast of the runway. Then the Three Stooges part — SecNAV looks to his left at FMFPAC who looks to his left to 1st MAW CO, who looks at the old MAG-12 CO, Colonel Brown, and finally they are all looking at Jay Hubbard. We laughed so hard that some of us fell down.

Both F-4 crewmembers lived but it would have been almost as funny if they hadn't. By the way, the second F-4 refolded his wings and slowly taxied back to the revetments. They down-loaded the bombs and defueled him, after which he flew back to Da Nang the next day after a very short takeoff roll.

Now, I don't know if this helps you, but it's what I remember. And, to quote Anthony Swofford author of *Jarhead* about the first Gulf War when asked whether his book was fact or fiction, he responded: "I don't know. It's what I remember."

Semper Fi,
Dave Marshall (aka: PigDog)

FROM THE ATTIC

Mailbag



Kaneohe MCAS 1962.

Morest gear snapped. Capt R P Connolly, VMA-212, ejected safely. A/C continued down the runway colliding with rocks in the ocean. This is the recovery.

(Editor - Photo from Norm Spilleth, VMA 212 Plane Captain, who witnessed the accident.)

Puresome Unplugged

~ YP's Excellent Adventures ~

From A-4Ever Skyhawk Association Journal Volume Fall 2015

~ Dead Sojers* ~

* Naval Aviator's Dictionary:

Dead Soldiers--the mangled aluminum, tin, and glass corpse containers of at-sea liquid joy, smashed flat and hidden away until suitable conditions for consignment to the deep, usually late at night.....

"When Puresome comes marching home again, *Hooraw! Hooraw!*" was playing with drums and fifes in Puresome's head as he and Weed heroically marched down the midnight passageway toward the fantail, magically invisible and oblivious to the tinkling contents of two parachute bags as they whanged against knee-knockers and pipes as the carrier thrummed through the night.

The silly grins that were frozen on their faces belied their grim mission. Earlier perusal of their magnificent stateroom had shown no more places to stow remains; and old, displaced skivvies piled in corners were causing scowls from the Brotherhood of Stewards. So, well fortified with cactus juice and Hawaiian Punch, a decent burial off the fantail was decided on.

Puresome and Weed had come by such a backlog as a result of planning. In preparation for the cruise, they had spent \$25 on a second-hand refrigerator, had it craned up to the number two elevator, and with the help of some of Weed's ordnance persons, stuffed it down two ladders and a passageway and into their stateroom. With the addition of a hasp and a lock, it was ready to produce ice to chill the vegetable and fruit juices so necessary to hydrate naval aviators.

The further discovery that two cases of foamy refreshment in a

parachute bag was the approximate size of an Akai tape recorder led to many conversations on the quarter-deck on returning to the ship:

"LTJG Puresome reports his return aboard, sir!"

"Very well! What'd you buy?"

"Akai tape recorder, sir!"

"You aviators sure do like your music.."

"Yes, sir!" With a stomp and salute.

Once though, Puresome actually did bring on an Akai tape recorder.

The ice and stockpiled refreshment made their stateroom a popular place. The dentist next door would come over, and he and Puresome would sing selected parts from "The Messiah" at the top of their alco-



"Day..is..done!" sang Puresome as he sailed a can and Weed did a kazoo imitation of "Taps." "Gone the...sun!" as another can arched into the dark. "From the...hill! And the dale! And like that there!.."

holic lungs. Many meetings of the Reserve Junior Officers Association were convened. Often, Puresome would lapse into sleep with someone like Ray Roge droning on about the physics of the interaction of ice cubes with the scorch in his mug, and awake hours later not to have missed any of the monologue. All in all, it helped everyone deal with the troublesome fact that, just because they were dropping bombs on North Vietnamese bridge approaches, the Gomers were trying to shoot them. Puresome thought this unreasonable and advocated bombing the dikes so they couldn't "have a rice day," but



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

Weed felt sorry for the poor girls.

But, for all the social good, possession of Sojers alive or dead was officially verboten. The word from the ship's XO was breaking of swords, ripping off of buttons and body parts if discovered. This naturally added piquancy to life aboard ship. Puresome's skipper and XO gained huge status when they locked everyone in the ready room at the end of line periods for piquant movies and doses of Old Overhold obtained from Quackus Attackus, the flight surgeon.

If swilling was semi-dangerous, disposing of the remains was doubly so. There were numerous stories of burial details come to grief. One such party had crept onto the flight deck and flung a paper sack full of casualties directly into an upright whip antennae, which had bent over and volleyed the sack back onto the flight deck, and the unfortunates had to chase the tinkling cans down the flight deck.

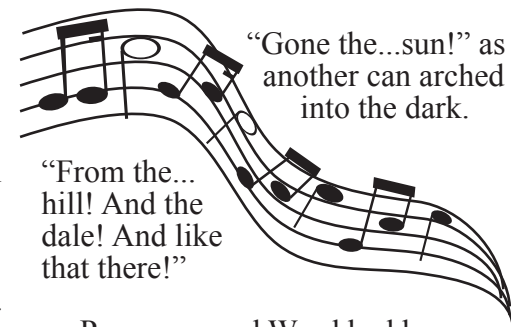
Thus, finally backed into a corner by a stateroom full of earthly remains, Puresome and Weed had fortified themselves, gathered up the evidence into two parachute bags,

and set off for the Zero-Dark-Thirty fantail.

The few persons encountered in the deserted passageways had evidently not seen anything amiss in two glazed-eyed characters in flight suits and orange ball caps hauling tinkling parachute bags that smelled strangely like stale juice of the hops.

With their pupils the size of pencil leads from the bright lights of the passageways, Puresome and Weed finally arrived at the fantail, which was dark as only night at sea can be. The two stood at the railing, momentarily mesmerized by the roiling phosphorescence of the wake. Then, unzipping the parachute bags, they started sailing the flattened cans into the night.

"Day..is..done!" sang Puresome as he sailed a can and Weed did a kazoo imitation of "Taps."



"From the...hill! And the dale! And like that there!"

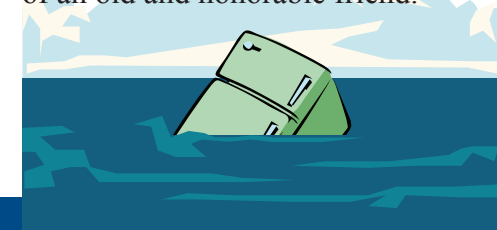
Puresome and Weed had happily conducted about a third of the required ceremony when their eyeballs started adjusting to the dark. At about the same time, they both became aware of....several cigarette ends glowing in the dark. They..Were..Not....Alone!

Yaaaaaa! Two parachute bags were flung over the railing and the two bugged out in panic like the nuggets they were, careening down passageways and ladders to huddle in their stateroom, waiting for the "man overboard" alarm to sound. As

their breathing slowly returned to normal, they realized that Grong, the God of Happy Hours, Olongopo and Junior Officers, had smiled on them once again, and they had truly been invisible. *Stupid, but invisible.*

So, survival broughteth wisdom. In the after days and on other cruises, Puresome and Weed passed on the knowledge of the ages, and more and more junior aviators survived the ritual.

When their reefer finally died of old age and interior fungus, a large group of young, manly men gathered on the number four sponson as it was chunked into the deep. It was as if they were witness to the passing of an old and honorable friend.



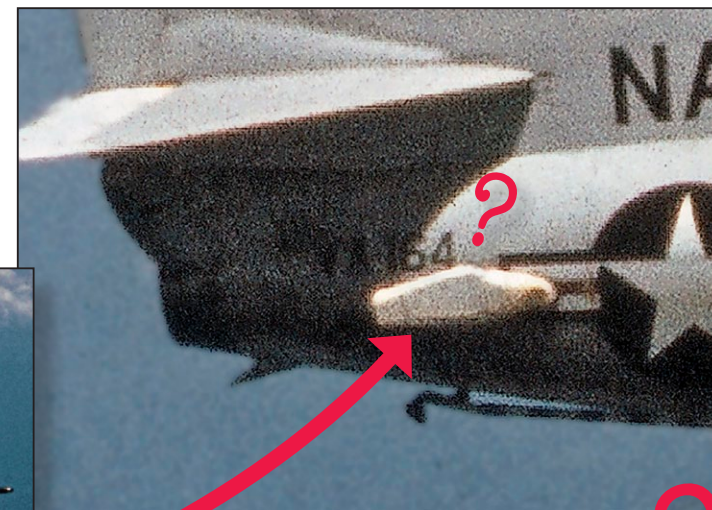
TRIVIA ANYONE?

from Dave Dollarhide

Next Question:



In the "properties" for this photo the description reads as follows: "Right side inflight view of VA-164 Ghost Riders A-4F Skyhawk BuNo 155066, NP-404, with a Shrike missile and ZUNI FFAR pod, SEA, 1970-73."



What else do you see? What's the gizmo on the rear fuselage, just behind the speed brake? The spin on this issue's question is, "WE DON'T KNOW." If you had the "secret handshake" back in the '70s, we'd love to know!

Send your answers to:
davedollarhide@msn.com



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