

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 27-2



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

Summer 2021

<http://skyhawk.org>



THE PREZ SEZ

By George "Woodpecker" Blosser

As I write the Prez Sez for the summer issue it seems we are finally getting back to some sense of normal after over a year of dealing with the Pandemic. Plans for TailHook 2021 are well underway and we can all look forward to that event. The Winter Board Meeting will take place on Friday morning at 8:00 a.m. during Hook 21. The legacy of the A-4 and its people is still our top priority.

BOD Meeting

- As previously announced, we held another Zoom BOD meeting on June 11th which was designed to be approximately 90 days prior to the in-person BOD Meeting scheduled during Hook21. A summary of the activity is listed below.
- The association arrangement with the Distinguished Flying Cross Society is continuing. The Skyhawk Association Hook21 ad has been published in the DFC Magazine and the DFC ad appeared in our spring issue of the Journal. The DFC ad is also in this issue of the Journal. Clearly this is a benefit for both organizations and we anticipate this arrangement will continue in the future.
 - Our Webmaster Gene Atwell, along with his assistant member Dick Nielsen, continues to work on the overall security and presentation of the website. You will soon see an option to purchase the A-4 Challenge Coins on the site.
 - A motion was passed to discontinue the Director and Officer Insurance for the association effective January 1, 2022. The current annual premium is \$617 and the BOD determined the money saved far outweighed the value of having the coverage.
 - The Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association (RRVA) is conducting a survey with regard to High-G Repetitive Strain Injury to those that have flown the A-4 Aircraft. We have agreed to participate in the survey and Director Bill "Jigger" Egen, our contact person, reports that members are being contacted and further details can be found on our website.

SDOs

- Our Squadron Duty Officers (SDO) program continues to be an important part of the Skyhawk Association structure. We have a few empty slots that need to be filled. In the interest of bringing this to everyone's attention, please take a look at the following list to see if you would be willing to help out with these vacancies.
- **Navy SDO Vacancies:** NARF NAS Alameda, CA, VF-101, VF-171, VT-27, VT-35, VA-210, VA-304, VA776, and VA-892. The primary contact for the Navy SDO Program is Terry Wolf (tairwolf@comcast.net)
 - **Marine SDO Vacancies:** MAG-11, MAG-13, MAG-15, MAG-24, MAG-32, MAG-42, MALS-42, VMA-123, VMA-124, VMA-134, VMA-143, VMA-144, VMA-211, VMA-212, VMF233, VMA-242, VMA-332 AND VMA-533. The Marine/International SDO contact is Director Bill Egen (bill.egen123@gmail.com)

Tailhook 2021

The Tailhook association has extended a deep discount to Skyhawk Members. The following instructions are provided for your convenience when registering. Go to www.tailhook.net and complete the following:

- When registering online:
- Select "Regular Attendee" as the Attendee Type on **page 1** of the registration form. Then, after entering your contact information, type "Skyhawk Association" in the "Reunion Group" box provided.
 - On **page 2**, select "Retired" as the registration category, then type in the "Coupon" box the code "reuniongroup2021" to receive your discounted registration fee of \$20, a \$45 savings.
 - Continue as directed.

Reservations at the Nugget can be made on the Tailhook website or call the hotel directly at 775-356-3300. There is a special rate of \$125 per night for Skyhawk Members.

Our usual booth will be in the vender area on the 2nd floor of the Nugget. The attack Ready Room is also on the 2nd floor in the Redwood section room 6. We will be joined this year by the A-7, A-6, A-3 and VA-25 A-1 drivers. Stop by and say hello.

The Skyhawk Luncheon will be at 10:00 a.m. on Friday in the Chalet Terrace area on the second floor (next to the pool). Our key note speaker will be POW/Motivational Speaker Charlie Plumb. Please mail your reservation for the luncheon plus \$35 per person to Mark Williams, 10432 Button Willow Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89134.

Odds and Ends

- Dave Dollarhide and Bob Hickerson continue working daily to keep the Skyhawk Journal "up and running." Articles are always welcome from the membership. Please don't hesitate to let them know if you have anything to contribute to the Journal.
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net
- If your contact information has changed don't forget to forward that information to Secretary Terry Cooney (skyhawkasn@gmail.com) so we can update our records.
- Current Skyhawk membership is holding steady at 745 paid memberships.
As I sign off with this addition of the Prez Sez, Covid-19 cases are decreasing nationwide and the vaccinations are increasing. Hopefully this will lead to a virus free 2021.
Kind regards to all.
A-4s Forever
"Woodpecker" sends



George "Woodpecker" Blosser



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2021 •

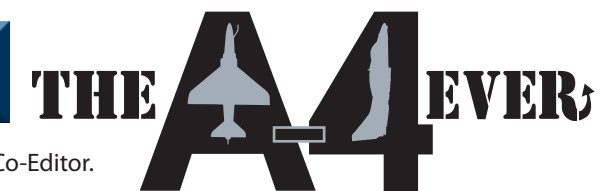
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Bob "Raven" Hickerson – Chairman/Co-Editor.

Dave "Hide" Dollarhide – Co-Editor.

Gene "Blade" Atwell – Webmaster.

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Contributions

We actively seek contributions from members, including news, photos, historical documents, anecdotes and other items of interest. Submissions may be edited due to space limitations in the newsletter. Contributions may be emailed to the Journal Editor at sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org. Stephanie Davis, graphics, skyhawk@ncflight.com. Printed by Acculink, Greenville, NC.

On the Cover: A flight of three CVWR-20 airplanes, two VA-204 A-4Ls fly wing on a VAQ-208 A-3 in the early 70s. Credit unknown.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org

■ **FROM: Charles “Rabbi” Schlom**
LTC, AVN, USA Retired



Hello, I’m looking for some contact information for LT Dennis Earl who flew *Skyhawk* AH300 and made an arrested barrier landing in October of 1967. I built a diorama of this incident (*Pilot combat injury-Ed*). As a retired Army Aviator, I build model airplanes and historic dioramas. Below is a link to the diorama mentioned that I would like to show Lt. Earl. His last known whereabouts was in Pensacola, FL, where he was a contract pilot with NAS’ NFO program. Any help would be greatly appreciated. cmschlom@hotmail.com

<https://www.britmodeller.com/forums/index.php?topic/235093367-gotcha-a-4e-crash-lands-on-a-carrier-deck/>

(John Sidney McCain III was later shot down and ejected while flying the same *Skyhawk*, BuNo 149959. – Ed).



FROM: Dave Dollarhide

Chuck, I’m the Co-Editor of the A-4Ever *Skyhawk* Journal and will include your email in our Summer issue in hopes that someone might remember Earl and his whereabouts.

FROM: Ed Copher SDO VA-163 Saints

Denny Earl lives in Utah, I sent Chuck his email address. Some of Chuck’s dioramas would be good in the *Skyhawk* magazine.

■ **FROM: John Little**

I am trying to get photos of the aircraft that my Father flew during his USMC career (1935-1961). In 1958 he flew A-4D-2’s with the following BuNo’s: 142097/142101/142105/142111/142117/142699/142722/142728

If you have any photographs of and of these aircraft I would certainly like a copy. Also I have not been able to find dispositions of 142097 and 142699.

FROM: Gary Verver
BuNo 142097

15 Aug 1967 transferred to NARTU, NAS Alameda, CA
22 Nov 1967 - Stricken ----- 1S (accidental damage)

BuNo 142699

06 Oct 1964 transferred to NARTU, NAS Memphis, TN
05 Oct 1965 - Stricken ----- 1S

FROM: Dave Dollarhide

I flew 142111 many times in ’67-68, while in VA-46, but have no pictures of the airplane.

FROM: John Little

Thank you very much for the information. I have a daunting task as my Father flew over 70 different types and models of aircraft. FYI, 142728 was sold to Argentina and was shot down by the RAF during the Falklands War and the pilot perished.

(John’s email is jlittle1@bellsouth.net - Ed)

■ **FROM: Bob “Boom” Powell**
Subject: VA-15 TINS article

Great Horned Toadies! How to scare a writer. Bo Smith’s TINS in Spring A-4Ever. I was on that deployment and had written up the same incident. How much did I have wrong? (Although there’s a lot a variation allowed in any good TINS.) In this case, not a thing. Bo provides some details I did not have, but the tale is the same, less, again, details. While asking permission to name names, I uncovered the juicy bit about who flew the purloined *Skyhawk*. Here’s my write-up from the days Cap’n Hook ran the Catwalk column and deigned to grant me a corner.

BOOM’S CORNER THE HOOK,
Spring 1988

Ever wonder how hard it would be to steal a jet? Say, a Skyhawk.

There are various ways that sister squadrons flying the same aircraft type within an air wing have of proving their superiority. Swiping squadron flags at cocktail parties and having the last man standing after playing at Stingers, Kamikazes or Flaming Hookers are merely forms of social misbehavior. What really counts among COs and maintenance officers is how many airplanes there are in the break at the ship after an in-port period.

TINS. USS Intrepid (CVS-11) during her deployments to the Tonkin Gulf carried not just two, but three A-4 squadrons. In 1967 the level of rivalry was fairly high, what with VA-15 having been on board “The Fighting I” the previous year, VA-34 also out of NAS Cecil but previously on a Med cruise, VSF-3’s upstarts out of Alameda, and a Skyraider squadron (VA-145) to stir the pot.

During an arduous mid-cruise in-port period at Cubi Point, the imaginative and daring maintenance officer of VA-15 decided to show up everyone by having not only all 16 assigned A-4Cs return to the ship, but one more. Though there was very little flying from the beach, port visits in those days were a strain, not only because of trying to cram 30 plus days of wine, women and song into five, but because all aircraft needed washing and other maintenance unavailable on the ship. All aircraft of the wing were flown or hoisted off for this reason, and consequently the fly-aboard the day the ship sailed was a major spectacle ..

The last night in port, while everyone else was cramming in a few last hours of liberty at the club on top of the hill or down in scenic Olongapo, VA-15’s maintenance officer kept a small group of his painters at the field and “converted” a VA-34 Skyhawk into a VA-15 Skyhawk. The rudder was painted gold and a Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club patch was put on the fin. The Blue Blasters chevron on the fuselage was painted over with the Valion and, of course, the 200 side number changed to a 300 series. A gold striped drop tank and “VA-15” on the speed brake completed the transformation. The A-4C was then towed out to the flight line among the scattered airplanes of Air Wing Ten.

This was only the first phase of the carefully conceived scheme.

Our hero had 16 squadron pilots and CAG to fly, having arranged for CDR Ken Burrows to take the purloined A-4! Naturally, CAG was one of the first to launch, so by the time the VA-34 pilots and maintenance detachment figured something was cockeyed, the evidence was gone.

The saddest sight of the day was a lone VA-34 pilot wandering the empty ramp muttering, “Where’s my airplane? I was supposed to have an airplane. Where did it go?”

At the ship, CAG landed the A-4 aboard (presumably an OK-3), parked as directed and had his picture taken on the boarding ladder, thus becoming an unknowing accomplice to the deed. He

left it for the aircraft handling officer to tell VA-34 that there was a Skyhawk down on the hangar deck with one of their BuNos but VA-15 paint on it. Though many schemes were proposed, retribution was never carried out.

The Valions maintenance officer? He continued to be aggressive and imaginative; confounding rivals and amazing subordinates. Your humble scribe had the privilege of working with RADM Jerry Tuttle when he flew his flag in Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69), and though the admiral never confessed to this sea story, YHS got it straight from a former JO in VA-15.

■ **FROM: Johnny Bittick**

I read your “Evolution of A-4 ECM Gear” article (The A-4Ever magazine) with great interest. My first Nam cruise was with VA-72 Blue Hawks aboard the *Independence* in 1965. After a 30-day enroute from Norfolk we arrived on station shortly after the first SA-2 site was up and running. We left in late November, and I think we were the first CAG to evolve SAM tactics.

Your article was very thorough, and I wanted to add just one thing to your story. After we got back in December 1965, and before leaving again in mid-1966, we got Shohorn installed. Sanders & the Navy were experimenting with various formations to defeat the Fansong radar. I and 3 others were sent TAD to Quonset Point R.I. Sanders had a facility in - I think - Manchester, where they had an actual Fansong radar installed. We flew various box formations with various distances between aircraft to see how it affected radar performance.

One other thing - in 1972 I did another Nam cruise with VA-164 Ghost Riders. We were, I think, the only Navy squadron with actual LGB capability. We could both lase and drop. If you have any interest, I could send you a short write-up. Thanks for a very informative article,

FROM: Tommy Thomason

Thanks for the positive review and the additional information. I had assumed that the stateside evaluation with

Fansong was done at China Lake so it was very interesting to hear that Sanders had one (or maybe an imitation).

I’m sure that Dave and Robert would be very interested in hearing from you about the VA-164 work with LGBs, as would I (see <https://tailhooktopics.blogspot.com/2012/08/a-4f-laser-spot-tracker.html>; comments and corrections welcome).

FROM: John Bittick

Tommy, thank you for your response. I had no idea about the blog page you sent! Some time ago I wrote up what I remembered about the project, my memory being what it is! If you don’t mind I’ll attach it to this email. I’d be happy to work with Dave and Robert if they think they can use it.

(NOTE! See John Bittick’s previously published article in this issue. – Editor)

■ **FROM: Christian Haugen**
Subject: My Father’s Callsign

I am hopeful you might be able to help me track down my father’s call sign. My son, now an ENS at Pensacola, is just embarking on his career in Naval Aviation. He’s in the first phase, now called NIFE. We were chatting the other day about him following in his grandfather’s footsteps and asked what his grandpa’s call sign was. I realized I don’t think I ever knew it.



My father was Adolph “Al” Haugen. He served from 1958 through 1967, finishing his Navy time as a flight instructor at Milton. He was USNA ’58. He flew with VA-146 in the early ’60s, including a cruise on the *Constellation* in the 1964 timeframe. I have his flight logs but they do not have any indication of his call sign. I have a couple of photos with him in a flight suit or next to a plane on the flight line, but the shots are either blurred or don’t include the area around the cockpit. *continued...*

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

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Dad passed away in 2003 at 68. ... sure wish he was here so I could ask him myself. I was USNA '84, went a different direction and ultimately commanded USS *Nebraska* (SSBN 739) (G) in the early 2000s. I wound up making a 25-year career of the Navy.

I would love for my son to know his Grandpa's call sign to add to the legacy he carries. Any support or pointers about where else I could look would be very much appreciated.

FROM: L Lassise (SDO VA-146)

Thank you for reaching out to the A-4 Skyhawk Association. Let me run with the information you've provided and I'll get back with you.

That said, I'm not sure when call signs became in vogue. Although, I think it's one of those things that morphed into existence around the end of your father's navy career. It's also great to hear your son is in flight training up at Pensacola. Has been assigned a training squadron yet?

Lastly, thank you for your 25 years of service. Skipping a "Boomer" is one helluva job and your ranks are few and far between. Well done!

FROM: Christian Haugen

Gentlemen (and recognizing you're all aviators, I use that term loosely)! Thank you so much for looking into this. Dad left the Navy reluctantly in 1967 after I and my brother were born while he was in WESTPAC, although the straw that drove him out was a pending assignment to NPGS in Monterey in the field of Ops Analysis.

He feared he was being pulled out of the operational side of the Navy and wouldn't fly again. He headed home to Minnesota and flew for Northwest Airlines for 30 years.

Here are a couple shots that I have of Dad and Mom--Mom is pregnant with me in the shots with Dad in SDBs and that's me on the ladder. Couple pages from one of his log books as well. (*Only the photo of Chris and his parents displayed is by the A-4 as shown - Ed*)



My son will head off to primary in July. He'll be training at NAS Corpus Christi. Sometime around completing that, he'll get his wings and be assigned to an aircraft and training pipeline. I am looking forward to attending his winging ceremony.

I'm looking forward to seeing what you can find out. Again, thanks for looking into this.

FROM: Dave Dollarhide

Congratulations to you and your son on his career in Naval Aviation!

Callsigns as I know it: In NAVAIR tactical units, to include both fighter and attack, the majority of aviators were tagged with a nickname, but not that many also had an unofficial callsign. A callsign was used to identify a formation flight, but most of the time the official squadron callsign was used as recorded in a publication called JANAP 119. I'm sure every sub you were on had its official callsign.

However, if the squadron callsign was not used and a formation flight was on a flight independent of other squadrons or ship, we would call ourselves whatever we liked, unless Air Traffic Control was involved, in which case the MODEX painted on the side and tail

of each airplane was used for the most part.

Callsigns were popularized by the movie *Top Gun*, but even then, they were really nicknames that referred to each other by their everyday nickname in flight. I think it was then nicknames became ingrained as "callsigns"...more so in fighter squadrons than attack, but similar in both communities, we would normally talk to each other on the radio using nicknames. I have some friends that I have no idea what their real first name might be to this day.

History lesson aside, the only way a callsign/nickname can be discovered is from the guys your father flew with. In that vein, we'll place your "letter to the editor" in the summer issue of our magazine, the A-4Ever Skyhawk Journal and hope someone recalls him. As an example, to see the once per year digital version for the public, go to our home page at [Home Page | The Skyhawk Association](#) and click on the cover of the winter issue. (A search engine review of our 24 year old site does not show him mentioned.)

(Anyone with information for Christian Haugen can contact him at christianhaugen@live.com - ED)

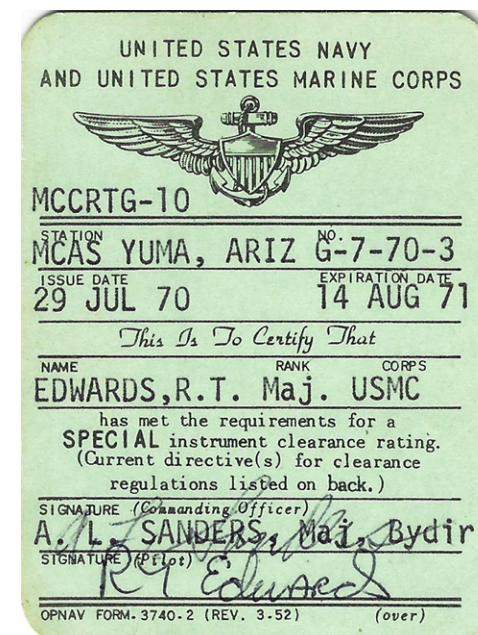
FROM: Roy "Howdy" Edwards To: Bob Hickerson

I just finished reading the article by Jim (Sandy) Sandberg in "The A4Ever" Spring 2021 edition about his Standard Instrument Card from VT-24.

Upon the completion of my first tour in Vietnam in '65-66 with MAG 12 VMA 211, I received orders to the Naval Advance Training Command in Beeville, TX. On arrival in Beeville, I was assigned to VT-24 as a flight instructor (IP) flying the F-9F, both single seat B and the 8T. There was a tremendous shortage of Student Naval Aviators (SNAs). In fact, the Marine Corps had an agreement with the USAF UPT Command to train basic pilots for the Marines to help meet this shortage. There was a big push to put out as many new Aviators as possible.

VT-24 was scheduling between 100 to 125 sorties a day. Of course,

we did not fly near that many due to maintenance and WX. We had IPs flying anywhere from 30 to 45 hours a month. When the weather was not VFR, we would launch max Student Naval Aviator (SNA) instrument sorties and would at the same time "Shot Gun" students with IPs on any sortie that could be flown over the overcast to get maximum completion rate. In fact, if you as an IP had a student in the Instrument phase of the syllabus, the Training Officer (T1) would give you a fuel packet and send you on your way to bases with better WX and instructions to call in at the end of the day.



To get maximum usage of the A/C, the T1 qualified as many of us that met the minimum qualifications of a Special Instrument Card. A copy of a 1976 green Special Instrument Card is attached. I can't remember what exactly the minimum requirements were to get a check ride for a "Green" Card. It was something like 1500 hours flight time, 100 hours of actual instruments, and so many actual IFR approaches. We had a senior Commander who was our Instrument Check Pilot. You had to fly 2 or 3 flights with him and would be questioned in detail on proper instrument procedures. When flying the F-9, we had to show proficiency in TACAN Approaches, UHF-DF single frequency Approaches, Low Freq ARN

6 Approaches, and GCA's. All flights were hooded T/O to Landing, to include ITO's under the bag.

In the 60's and earlier if you were going on an instrument flight or cross country you had to fill out a DD-175 flight plan, go to Base Ops get a weather brief from Metrology, check the NOTAMS. If you were a Standard Instrument Card holder, you would then have the Base Ops Duty Officer sign and approve your flight plan and file the plan. The Standard Card holder also had to have minimum WX, like the ceiling not less than 200 and 1/2 mile visibility or the instrument approach minimums as well as restrictions on the WX at his filed destination. Having a "Green" Card eliminated the requirement of getting the Base Duty Officer's signature. The aviator who held a "Green" Card was to exercise good judgment; and the restrictions did not apply. Several times during my tour in VT-24, the T1 launched the IP's who held Special Instrument Ratings into "Dog Doo" weather knowing that you were going to have to divert to another field.

We had a lot of great Marine pilots in VT-24 and 25 in Beeville, TX. To name a few: John Ditto, Bob Melville, Jon Gibson, Rich Hooper, Dave Tomasko (Tomato), Rick Klinginsmith, Jim Skinner, Dorsey Page,

FROM: Stephen Hodgson, Captain USMCR 1967-73

Greetings, My brother (William C. Hodgson) was a Navy A-4 pilot in the later part of the 1960's and early 1970, He passed away in 2016, and I am trying to locate some of his fellow pilots. I am pretty sure he was with VA-172. He loved flying and the A-4. Any assistance you could provide would be appreciated.

FROM: Dave Dollarhide

I have a friend who was in 172 in the late sixties, who related that he remembers your brother. He tells me William joined the squadron after they returned from a combat cruise to Vietnam, then made the next deployment with them to the Med. He remembers that he was dating a Greek lady and later married

her. ...says he flew for Eastern. That's not much, except to say you are right about him being in 172.

FROM: Stephen Hodgson

Thank you so much...appreciated. A good start to my quest, and possibly others may surface. I know my brother made many carrier landings. I have seen a certificate he received after his first 100, but not sure of the eventual total.

P.S. Bill did marry a woman (sister-in-law Voila) from Greece and flew for many years with Eastern.

While still in the Reserves, I was in graduate school at the University of Maryland (1970-71).

Our parents lived close to Andrews Air Force Base outside of Washington, and I remember several occasions when my Mom, Dad and I met Bill and his A-4 trainee (unless it was a solo trip that day) at Andrews for a quick turnaround lunch. In those days, you could walk right-up to the plane. A proud moment for a ground-pounder like myself. Thank you again for your assistance. All the best.

FROM: Tom Dawson (Juneau Alaska)

Subject: Gary Verver collection



I found this photo at this location (*On the VA-72 unit page of the website - Ed*) ...with this statement: "02 Oct. 1966: A-4E BUNO 151106, AB 500, as it loses a SHRIKE missile during an arrested landing aboard the Roosevelt. Dated 2 Oct 1966 and is official U.S. Navy from Gary Verver collection."

Just to add a little more to the story...
continued...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR continued.

I was aboard the USS *Roosevelt* CVA 42 during this deployment to Vietnam and in the VA 72 Blue Hawks Squadron. This A-4 *Skyhawk* is a Blue Hawk from my squadron. I was an AEAN at the time and was working the flight deck during this deployment on an ordnance loading team and was up on deck when this happened.

The SHRIKE missile came to a stop near the bow of the carrier where I was at the time. Everybody scrambled away, except me. The EOD came running up the deck and he and I picked up the damaged missile and threw it off the bow of the ship. He thanked me, everybody else came back and we all went back about our business.

I served my next two Vietnam deployments (1968-1969) aboard the USS

Ranger with VF-154 as an AE flight deck troubleshooter for the F-4 *Phantom*.

FROM: Gary Verver

Thomas, I've seen some speculation as to why it came off when he trapped. Do you know what failed?

FROM: Tom Dawson

I do not recall what the ultimate reason for the failure was. I was not privy to that information. From what I do recall, the pilot had attempted to fire his missiles during the combat sortie, but that particular pylon wouldn't energize or fire during several attempts, and before landing he did a fly by to see what things looked like, and also attempted to pickle the pylon with the missiles attached and it wouldn't pickle either.

The fly-by showed the missiles to be hanging normally, so a warning was given on the flight deck that he would be landing with missiles aboard, and all unnecessary personnel clear the flight deck and those remaining to be prepared for anything. I do recall that they waited to land him last in the recovery sequence. We were surprised it didn't fly off the angle deck, and that it took a slight deflected turn and went up the main deck port side before coming to a stop.

I do recall several other aircraft recovered with ordnance still attached during that deployment, but this is the only one on the *Rosie* that I recall coming loose. A similar incident also happened on the USS *Ranger* a year or so later with an AIM-Sidewinder missile coming loose that I also assisted in dumping over the side. I believe that one came loose from an F4 *Phantom*.

.....

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

A-4 Skyhawk Association Reunion and Membership Luncheon

Hook 21 - Nugget Hotel - Sep 9 thru 11



Visit our Exhibit Booth

skyhawk.org

LUNCHEON
Friday, Sep 10, 10AM
Poolside Chalet Terrace

SPEAKER
Captain Charlie Plumb
POW and Motivational
Speaker

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**ATTACK
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Read?

you think
we *read*?

WHERE THE HIGH WINDS SING A NAVAL AVIATOR'S POETRY OF WAR AND REFLECTION

Author: Don Purdy
OK-3 PUBLISHING

As a fellow Attack Pilot of Don Purdy's era, this slim volume knocked the breath out of me. It was more than the recognition of the bang-on accurate operational detail of the A-4E *Skyhawk* aircraft we both flew. But the poems describing the missions transcend the Joe Cool mandatory Piece of Cake Naval Aviator exterior. He absolutely captures the intensity of the complete night carrier landing experience and of combat.

The "Songs of War" about an Alpha Strike loss of an aircraft to a SAM includes a stream of consciousness from the stricken pilot from the explosion to ground impact. It is the Southeast Asia version of "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," and it was so horrifyingly gripping to this reviewer that he had to set the book aside for a good while before finishing.

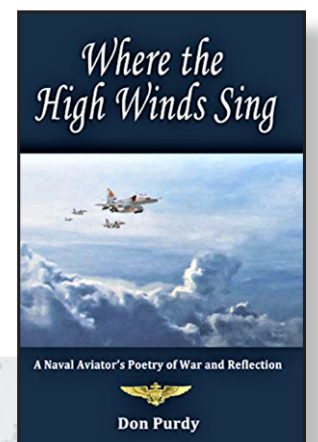
Don Purdy's first tour on Yankee Station was with Attack Squadron VA-164, the Ghost riders, in Carrier Air Wing Sixteen aboard the USS *Oriskany*. CVW-16 was known as "Bloody Sixteen," and it suffered the highest loss rate of any Navy Air Wing during the Vietnam war. Don continued a second tour on the USS *Hancock* for a total of 218 combat missions.

The book is really about Survivor's Guilt, and Don knows his subject. It is about an enduring sense of loss, of "why them and not me?"

Combat veterans know that this is unanswerable and is always present.

Poetry condenses a story into few words, and Don Purdy is a gifted poet. I highly recommend this book for that reason and as an accurate set of snapshots of the Naval Attack pilot's air war in Vietnam.

VR,
CDR Jack Woodul, USNR-RET
Aka Youthly Puresome



Painting Off Target by Don Purdy

The USS *Oriskany* Fire Stories

continued...

October 26, 1966

The Oriskany Fire, A Personal Recollection By James Marcely

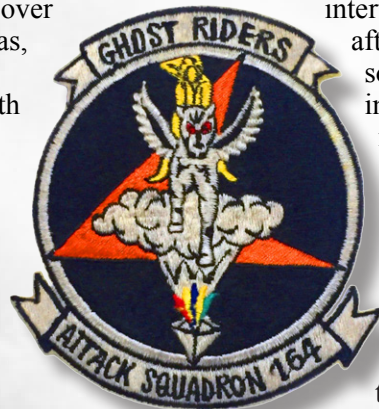
On October 26, 1966, I was a Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTJG) in the Navy aboard the USS *Oriskany* in the Gulf of Tonkin. We were assigned to Task Force 77, which comprised all the aircraft carriers and their escorting destroyers in the Seventh Fleet. The *Oriskany* and the other carriers were conducting 24 hour “cyclic operations” against North Vietnam. *Oriskany* was a small-deck Essex class carrier of WW II design that had been modernized during the 1950’s with an angled deck and an enclosed “hurricane” bow.

At that time in the Vietnam War, the Navy maintained a continuous presence of three attack carriers in the Tonkin Gulf. Each conducted a twelve-hour stint of flight operations one 0600-1800, one 1200-2400, and the third at 0000-1200 (the night carrier). On 26 October we were the night carrier. At midnight our aircraft were loaded with ordnance for the first of eight launch and recovery cycles of our twelve-hour commitment. Because the first launch would be a night hop, our A-4 *Skyhawks* and A-1 *Skyraiders* would carry parachute flares that provide some illumination so that the pilots will be able to detect and attack the North

Vietnamese on the ground and waterways moving supplies to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Because of thick low clouds that prevailed over our prospective target areas, the first five of the eight cycles were cancelled, with the prospect of resuming flight operations at 0730 to 1200. Consequently, the parachute flares were not needed for the morning launch and were downloaded to be returned to the ready flare locker in the hangar bay. In the process of returning the flares to their locker, one or more of the flares were not properly “safed.” One of the unsafe flares ignited and some 650 flares proceeded to cook off. Each magnesium flare burned at more than 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit. By the time the fire was finally under control, forty-four of my shipmates were dead. The story of the fire will later be well told by CAPT Wynn Foster in his superb book, *Fire on the Hangar Deck, the Ordeal of the Oriskany*.

I was assigned to Attack Squadron 164 (the Ghost Riders), one of the two A-4E *Skyhawk* squadrons in Air Wing

16 on the *Oriskany*. I was the squadron Air Intelligence Officer. My principal job during air operations was to interview (debrief) the pilots after they return from their sorties and prepare the information for inclusion in the standard reports required from the ship.



I had not gone back to bed when the night launches were cancelled. I was sitting in my chair sucking on my coffee mug in the Ghost Rider’s 02 level Ready Room with four or five pilots when the fire broke out. At 0725 the IMC (the ship’s public address system) squawked “*This is a drill. Fire, fire, fire . . . This is NO drill! This is NO drill! Fire, fire in the hangar bay, starboard side forward, frame 42!*” A short time later the IMC squawked again, “*General Quarters! General Quarters! All personnel man your General Quarters Stations!*” This calls everyone out of their bunks and to their battle-ready positions. In addition, after a short interval for everyone to get in place, all watertight doors and other apertures in the ship’s hull were closed.

Fire calls on the ship occurred fairly frequently, once a week or so. They had always been quickly dealt with by the ship’s Damage Controlmen (fire fighters). The Air Wing’s job was to stay out of their way. However, the urgency of the voice on the IMC got our attention. My General Quarters station was the Squadron Ready Room, so I was already where I was supposed to be.

Within a minute or so after the fire call, black smoke started pouring out of the Ready Room’s forced air ventilation duct.

I knew there was plenty of duct tape in the Intelligence/Strike Operations Center just across the centerline passageway. I was thinking that we would be able to stop the smoke from pouring into the Ready Room. When I entered Intel/Strike Ops, smoke was filling those spaces too. Before I was able to lay my hands on a roll of duct tape, the ship’s Operations Officer, CDR Del Nordberg, entered and in a loud authoritative voice, ordered “Everybody up to the flight deck now!” That overruled our General Quarters obligation, so we quickly departed through the Intelligence Center into the center-line passageway. The passageway was filled with blinding smoke so thick that we all spontaneously grabbed the belt of the person in front of us to form a human chain. We proceeded about 30 feet aft, then turned left into a transverse passageway that led us to the ladder leading to the flight deck and clear, fresh air.

I saw smoke billowing up from the starboard side of the ship forward and joined a group of pilots congregated near the Landing Signal Officer’s platform port side aft. I had no particular

purpose at that point except to stay out of the way. I noticed that the flight deck was significantly closer to the ocean level than I had ever seen, because of all the water used to fight the fire in the interior of the ship brought up the thought and conversation around to what we would do if we abandoned ship. We knew there were life jackets somewhere on the ship designated to be used by the air wing, but none of us knew where they were. During my sixteen weeks of training to be a Naval Officer, I had learned how to survive in the water. I was fairly confident that I would be able to tread water and float on my back for an extended period waiting to be rescued.

After about an hour of doing nothing but staying out of the way and feeling useless, Ensign Sheldon Woodle, a pilot from the ship’s helicopter detachment, approached us disheveled and sweaty. He had been in the hangar bay fighting the fire, which he described as now under control. He said that there were dead sailors and survivors trapped in the officers’ berthing area forward of the hangar bay toward the forecastle.

It occurred to me that Sheldon was not a Damage Control Officer and had no specific responsibility to fight the fire. One of those cartoon light bulbs went off in my brain. I had found a place for cowards to stay safe while heroes moved to the danger that threatened our ship and the lives of our shipmates. Guilt moved my feet to the hangar bay.

There I found a scene of devastation. The metal bulkheads and walls were blackened as if they are charred wood. Aircraft were blackened also. On two *Skyhawks* the heat had triggered the ejection seats, which zoomed up their launch rails, but were stopped at the top of the launch rails by safety pins. The hangar deck is a chaos of purposeful activity. Sailors were wheeling bombs on bomb carts to the port sponson and dumping them over the side. Also on the port sponson are a number of bodies covered by tarps. On the port side of the hanger forward there was a ladder up to a passageway that led to the portside staterooms for officers. At the base of the ladder several sailors were passing out Oxygen Breathing Apparatuses (OBAs). They are a sort

continued...

Oriskany flight deck during fire.



James Marcely Oriskany Story *continued...*

of vest and goggled hood with a canister of oxygen attached to the vest. The replaceable oxygen canister lasts about one hour. I find three sailors who aren't involved in any other activity. We formed a search team to find shipmates, hopefully live, who had been trapped in their staterooms by the fires. We got five OBA's, battle lanterns, and a length of rope to be our safety line and proceeded up the ladder to the O2 level and entered the portside passageway. The air is still hot (maybe 120 degrees or so) and the smoke so thick that the battle lantern's shaft of light is limited to about five feet. We proceeded forward, checking each stateroom to the right

and left. We felt around the bunks with our hands, shined the lanterns around, and probed the deck with our feet. Most of the staterooms were empty. We found one dead shipmate in his bunk, and muscled his limp body back through the passageway to the top of the ladder where others relieved our burden. Then we returned to search the transverse passageway on the O2 level just beyond the forward hangar bay and the forward aircraft elevator. This was an area of one-man staterooms occupied by more senior officers. A double wide centerline ladder led up from the hangar bay (the O1 level) to the O2 level. In the stateroom at the top of the double wide

ladder, we found a second dead body in his bunk. We pass his body down the double-wide ladder to other sailors on the hangar deck. We continued searching, but found no more bodies.

I returned to the Ready Room. A muster was in progress to see who was missing. Four Ghost Riders: CDR Clyde Welsh, LCDR Dan Strong, LTJG Bill Johnson, and LTJG Jim Brewer were dead. One of my compatriot Air Intelligence officers, ENS Chuck Boggs from Fighter Squadron 162, is also dead. All died of smoke inhalation in the officer's berthing area forward of the hangar bay. Forty-four of my shipmates are gone, twenty-nine from the air wing, fifteen from the ship's company.

We secured from General Quarters. The fires were squelched. The ventilation system that so efficiently distributed the smoke cleared it away, and electric power and lighting was restored to the entire ship. I returned to the area that we searched to try to identify the two bodies we found. Because the smoke had been so thick, I was not certain in which compartment we found the first body, but I think it was LTJG Ramon Copple from the ship's Supply Division. On the door of the stateroom at the top of the centerline double ladder I saw a name card; *CDR Clyde R. Welsh, USN*, our Squadron Executive Officer, was the second body we found.

I continued exploring the area where most of my shipmates were killed. Some of the officers that survived the fire had escaped by fleeing forward into the forecandle and then up to the flight deck. Most of the air wing officers who died had not explored this part of the ship and were not familiar with this escape route.

When the *Oriskany* was built, there were portholes that opened to the ocean in the berthing compartments on the O2 level. When the ship was modernized in 1959 the new hurricane bow enclosed this area so that those portholes now opened to an enclosed passageway. As I proceeded forward in this passageway, I looked into an opened porthole and saw a sailor sitting at the desk of a dead shipmate rummaging through his personnel effects. I shouted, "Stop right where you are!" He immediately rushed out of the compartment. I didn't know if he would flee forward or aft, but guessed forward and ran to the forecandle to intercept him. I guessed wrong. I was enraged. What kind of turd would rob a dead shipmate? I find myself thinking that flogging should be restored to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. He was short and sort of swarthy, but beyond that I did not get a good enough look at him to subsequently identify him.

After this I went up to "Vultures Row" on the island (superstructure) to watch what was going on. The carriers *USS Constellation* and the *USS Franklin D. Roosevelt* were within view and following us. Their helicopters were shuttling to and from our flight deck picking up injured sailors from our



Oriskany VA-163 burned A-4.

overwhelmed sick bay. Soon, two big Air Force "Jolly Green" rescue helicopters from South Vietnam joined in. It was interesting to watch an Air Force helicopter pilot that always lands on a solid piece of ground trying to land on a platform that was moving forward at about 20 mph or so. There was a bit of lurching to and fro, but pretty soon they got the hang of it.

The heat from the fire had warped both catapults, so the *Oriskany* was no longer able to accomplish its mission. We turned eastward for our base in Subic Bay in the Philippines. Because of water damage, the wardroom was no longer available, so that officers had to eat in the Chief Petty Officers mess...no more table linens and cloth napkins.

Nationwide, the *Oriskany* fire had been all over the news media. The Communications Department on the ship jury rigged a hookup to the commercial telephone system back stateside. We were scheduled one by one for a brief call. I called my wife Mary Ann in St. Louis to assure her that I was OK and tell her who we lost among the Ghost Riders. She knows the wives, of course. I also called my family home in Wisconsin and reassured my Mom. Dad was at work at the time.

During this period between the news of the fire and my call to my Mom, Dad got in touch with the office of Senator

William Proxmire (D-Wisconsin). They contacted Navy HQ to get a list of casualties. It took some time for the *Oriskany* to count and identify each of the dead and to verify that the list was complete, i.e., there are no more dead bodies and no one missing. After some time of anguish for my family, Senator Proxmire's staff called to say that, "Your son is not on the list of casualties" but with no confirmation that the list was complete. So, the call to my Mom was a great relief.

The fire occurred during our last line period. We were scheduled to go to Singapore for a port call about two weeks after the fire, and then back home via Subic Bay to San Francisco.

We missed Singapore. Rats!

The *Oriskany* was repaired at Hunter's Point Shipyard, and completed nine more deployments to the Western Pacific before she was decommissioned in 1976. She was the last of the Essex class carriers to serve in a combat role.

In the end, because of the *Oriskany* fire and later destructive fires on the *USS Forrestal* (134 killed) and the *USS Enterprise* (28 killed), the Navy instituted a grueling, hands-on "eat some smoke" firefighting training for all shipboard personnel. (Additionally, new personal breathing apparatuses were installed next to every bunk on all ships. — Ed). ■



Oriskany recovering after fire.

THE TA-4F LASER DESIGNATOR

By Johnny Bittick

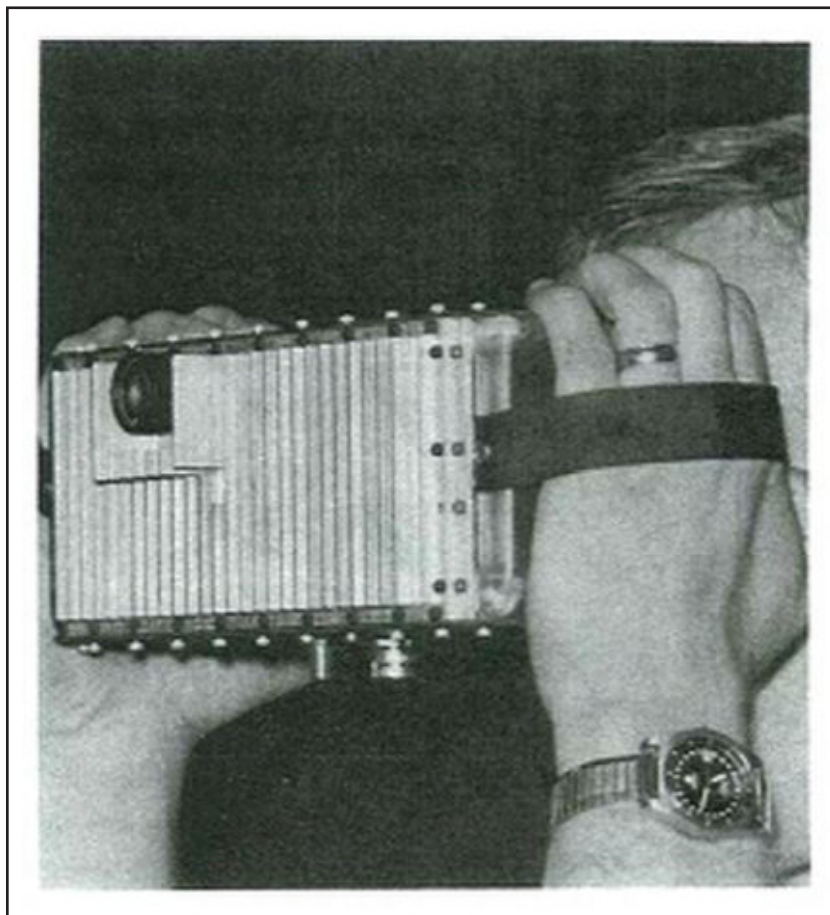
During the early 1970s, VA-164 (The Ghost Riders) had the A-4 Super Fox equipped with the Ferranti gun sight. The Ferranti had a laser seeker in place of the radar dish, and a moveable donut slaved to the seeker in the gun sight picture. In short, we could see the laser spot on the ground through the gun sight. It was like getting a radar lock in a fighter. During the 1970-71 cruise the squadron used Air Force OV-10s to designate targets in South Vietnam and used the donut as the aiming point for iron bombs. At the end of the cruise, the Air Force told the Navy they had better things to do than spot targets for them, which left the Navy with an asset they couldn't use. When we left for another WestPac tour in January 1972, the squadron sent me and another newbie to Iwakuni to "borrow" two combat-configured TA-4Fs from the

By the time we got to Cubi, a China Lake representative was waiting with a hand-held laser designator. Rumor had it that a couple of engineers had built the thing in their garage on weekends!

Marines. By the time we got to Cubi, a China Lake representative was waiting with a hand-held laser designator. Rumor had it that a couple of engineers had built the thing in their garage on weekends! There was no test program, no OPEVAL - it was going to be used for the first time in combat.

The first designators had problems - mainly cooling and jitter. As squadron Operations Officer I, along with a couple of others, flew almost all of the designator hops. It was amazing - we'd bring the thing back, tell the China Lake rep what was wrong with it, and in a couple of days we had a new, improved box in our hands! The unit was about the size of a cigar box, was plugged in to a 28 volt power receptacle in the cockpit, had its own internal cooling system, and the transmitter & cross hairs were gyro stabilized. What made it efficient and effective was that we could see the laser spot, allowing us to tell if the unit quit operating. Because of that, we didn't waste any laser-guided bombs (LGB).

We worked out the bugs down south and then took our show up north. Way up north. No one else had this system, so we developed our own tactics. The designator flew along at approximately 3,000', dodging and weaving while looking for trucks under trees, fuel dumps, etc. The bomber was at 16,000' about 2



The Lightweight Laser (LWL), affectionately known as the Brownie, weighed eight pounds and had a 70% success rate when designating from F-4s and TA-4s. USN Photo provided by Cliff Lawson.



"Borrowed" TA-4F traps aboard Hancock on 1972 cruise. Image via author.



Laser-guided Bomb loaded on A-4E 148613 at China Lake 1975. Image via Skyhawk Association.

miles behind, keeping the TA-4 in sight. Our standard bomber configuration was a 400 gallon center-line drop tank with three LGBs on each wing. The "T" had the usual 300 gallon drop tank on each wing, so we often hung a MK-83 or MK-84 on the center-line station. When the TA-4 pilot found a target, he would pop-up, circle and designate the target. When the bomber pilot obtained a good lock on the laser spot, he would fly into the LGB "basket" and release the bomb. The intent was to get bomb impact before the gomers figured out what was happening. We didn't lose anybody, so I guess it worked.

The system was extremely efficient. I remember one mission where we discovered a disassembled pontoon bridge along a good-sized stream. The pontoons were far enough apart so one bomb could destroy only one pontoon, and it took almost a direct hit at that. The Deadly LGB Duo went to work and a pontoon was destroyed with each and every bomb, something unheard of with iron sights and iron bombs! One aircraft loaded with six MK-82 LGBs wiped out the entire bridge,

something a whole flight with dumb bombs would have been lucky to do.

On another flight, I was flying the TA-4 and my back-seater saw a truck pulled up under a large tree. I talked the bomber's eyes onto the tree, but he couldn't see the truck. No matter - we designated the truck and the bomber released his LGB, scoring a direct hit on a target he never saw.

Our squadron was short on pilots during that cruise, and the schedule wouldn't permit using one of our own in the back seat of the TA-4. My regular back-seater was an A-7 pilot doing his ship's company tour in Air Ops. He volunteered, and we used him. It wasn't until later that I wondered what would have happened if we had been shot down!

Toward the end of our cruise the Navy wanted to continue the program using F-4s as designators and A-7s as bombers. (CVW-21 on Hancock was the last Air Group with A-4s and F-8s assigned). I took a two plane detachment to the other four CVs on Yankee Station at that time to teach them how to use the designator

system. They had only moderate success because the bombers couldn't see the laser spot on the target and therefore couldn't tell if the designator overheated and quit firing.

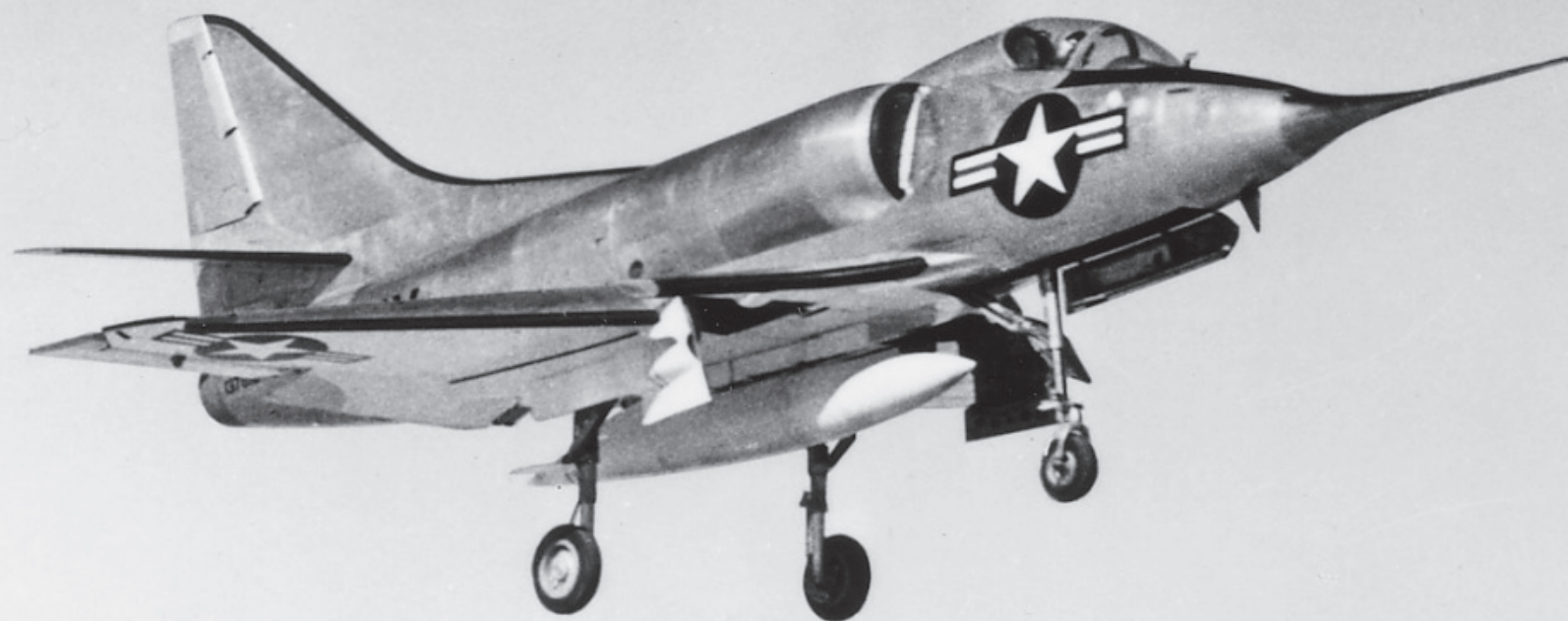
We were asked to write up the tactics for inclusion in the NATOPS confidential supplement. My assistant Operations Officer was a good artist. He did the illustrations, and I wrote the verbiage, which was published as submitted. However, that was in October, 1972, and the war was over a few months later. It wasn't long before the Navy had a new airplane with designator capability, so I think VA-164 was the only outfit to really use the hand-held laser designator system.

One of the lessons I learned from the experience is how quickly and efficiently a completely new war-fighting tool can be designed, developed, tested and employed when it's done by the fleet operators in response to a combat-related need, outside of the normal procurement system.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Top Aces Skyhawk Upgrades

By Dave “Hide” Dollarhide



The Skyhawk Association’s “Keeper of the Count,” Todd “Hun” Frommelt, has reported forty-four A-4s still flying worldwide, but it’s more than just the numbers. Many of these *Skyhawks* are operated by military contractors that compete for the adversary role in the training of pilots flying modern day fighters. *Top Aces* is a leader in that regard, as they continue to upgrade their airplanes under contract with the German Air Force at Wittmund Air Force Base.

Top Aces provides the following comments and photo:

“The Douglas A-4N *Skyhawk* aircraft is a proven and trusted platform for all mission profiles. The A-4N variant was upgraded extensively in-service. The single and dual-seat *Skyhawks* have been upgraded by Top Aces and have modernized IFR, Tactical Air Navigation System, and ESCAPAC ejection seats for maximum operational flexibility and aircrew safety. In addition, we’re now integrating our proprietary *Advanced Aggressor Mission System (AAMS – Ed)* onto our *Skyhawks*, allowing our aircraft to simulate the highly advanced capabilities of latest generation air-to-air combat opponents.”

“The system features an Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, helmet mounted display technology, data link communications between aircraft, as well as the ability to employ advanced electronic attack pods, in addition to many other capabilities.”

This is truly amazing when you consider the first flight of the A-4 was 67 years ago, in 1954, when the hand-built prototype took to the air. Right up front, the “Hot Rod” won the low altitude speed record, only to be bettered later by the afterburning F-100. Many more accomplishments and millions of hard-won flight hours followed over the years... and so it still goes! 

A-4 MID-AIR COLLISION

By Doug Cutter



It was the summer of 1971, I was new to the Reserves, still in a bit of a culture shock as to their traditions and policies. I had been recently released from active duty after completing two combat tours, including 201 combat missions over North Viet Nam. These were aboard the USS *Kitty Hawk* in the Roadrunners of VA-144, flying the A-4C, followed by the A-4E. Shore duty followed in China Lake, assigned to VX5. I didn't know it when I reported, but this was a "plum" assignment.

Over the next two years, I was privileged to fly the A-4C/E/F and TA-4. Shortly after arrival, I checked out in the A-7A & B, and later was the first project pilot on the A-7E. I was able to get a few hours in the F-4, and a lot of hours in the US-2 (parts runs, as there was no supply depot in China Lake.) I was even allowed to fly an A-4 down to Edwards AFB to check out one of their test pilots in exchange for my checking out in the F104.

All of this is to say I felt I had some pretty good experience and even had a few layers of "salt" on me.

After being hired by Delta in early 1970, my first stop was at NAS Atlanta (who shared the field with Dobbins AFB and Lockheed.) At that time, the Reserves were flying F-8s and the C-118, along with a few P-2s. My choice was obvious, and after a bit of fast talking, I began my checkout in the F-8. The pilots there were almost all airline, most from fighter background, well experienced and talented. Discipline was not part of the culture. Shortly after my F-8 checkout, the Reserves made a quantum leap into the RESFORON structure. I won't take the time here to explain all the differences, but briefly, the concept was to transition the Reserves from a "weekend flying club" to something mirroring an

active duty Air Wing, one east coast, one west coast, carrier qualified and ready to deploy on short notice.

This brought VA-205 to NAS Atlanta. I was proud to be a "plank owner." It also brought the A-4L (a souped up A-4C.). Two thirds of the pilots, including the CO, XO and all department heads were drawn from the old "flying club." The rest were like me, recently released from active duty, with A-4 background, combat experienced and newly hired by the airlines. This brings us to the fateful day in 1971.

I was scheduled for an early afternoon launch, flight of 4. I don't recall the mission, but it was generally understood that it would end in a lot of G's, a lot of turns, and someone would end up on someone else's six o'clock. I was #2 (jr. guy), #1 was the Ops Officer, #3 and #4 were also "old timers." It was all VFR. Shortly after takeoff and rendezvous, it became obvious that #4 had no radio (NORDO). That didn't change the mission, which normally included some low-level flying in the North Ga. mountains. We popped up to 12-15,000 ft. and the lead called to turn out for separation. For those unfamiliar, this involved the two sections (1 & 2, 3 & 4) to turn away from each other at about 45 degrees each, go to full power, accelerate as much as possible, and climb as much as possible. After 3-5 miles of separation, the lead called, "Turn in, fights on!"

The next few minutes will always be indelibly etched in my mind. I was on the flight leader's left side, trying to maintain a combat spread and glancing over to try and pick up 3 & 4. The lead, presumably, was turning directly towards 3 & 4, maintaining full power and descending to cross 3 & 4 with as much energy as possible. When I picked up 3 & 4, I noted that 4 was on 3's right wing

and since I was on 1's left wing, I immediately crossed under to the opposite wing, to allow me to keep the other three aircraft in sight. As expected, as we approached a quarter mile separation, both leads began a high G pull up. The object, of course, is to cross the other section as close as possible with as much energy as possible. From my position, again trying to maintain position on the leader and keep the other aircraft in sight, I couldn't tell how much separation was between 1 & 3, but I knew it would be close.

The next thing I saw was a huge fireball. At that moment, I couldn't have told you which of the other three aircraft were involved. Later investigation determined 3's nose struck 1's fuselage just behind the cockpit. Moments later, an ejection seat left the fireball, followed by a chute opening. I circled the debris, not finding any large pieces. I then noticed 4 circling the debris field. I had a good chute and appeared to have survived. I took note of our position...right over Berry College, near Rome, Ga. (This was very close to the Rome Arrival into Atlanta.) I called in to report the emergency, position and status. I then joined up with the NORDO 4 and led him back to Dobbins.

Upon taxi in, I found my C.O. & X.O. waiting for me in an idling Marine helicopter. We took off immediately and headed toward the crash scene. I neglected to mention earlier, that I happened to be the Squadron Safety Officer. Enroute to the site I made as many notes as possible while it was still fresh in my mind. The crash scene, itself, is not something I want to revisit or talk about.

Suffice it to say, I survived uninjured, I spent another 15 years in the squadron, have a wealth of good memories and numerous life-long friends from those days.

FROM THE ATTIC

Mailbag

~ Flying Brothers ~

By Dave "Hide" Dollarhide



"Gunny Rav" two from the right standing.

This piece of history was provided by Skyhawk Association Vice President, Bill "Gunny" Ravgiola, who was deployed aboard USS *Coral Sea* with VMA-121 in 1960. Their sister Skyhawk squadron was VA-93, comprising a Marine/Navy team known as *The Flying Brothers* during *The South East Asia Aerial Competition*, organized by CDR Gendron.

Other competitors are not recalled, but the primary focus was air to ground weapons delivery, to include *Low Angle Bombing System* (LABS) training and the Flying Brothers are said to have won the competition.

Further research shows that behind the scenes, as with many sea power exercises, demonstrating a show of force is the real motivation, due to regional threats. In fact, a military coup was taking place that year in Laos and China was flexing its muscles. According to the USS *Coral Sea* website, "*Several crises with Communist China over Taiwan and the crisis in Laos resulted*

in U.S. Pacific forces being put on high alert several times during the early 1960's prompting CINCPAC to deploy nuclear forces. During 1961, for example, PACOM forces were alerted twice for imminent combat action and combat units were pre-positioned in the Philippines, on Okinawa, or in the South China Sea. Equipment was loaded, and planes and ships stood by ready to move forces into Southwest Asia immediately upon receiving an order to execute war plans. These crises put to the test a new nuclear war plan introduced by the US Navy in the early 1960's; the Single Integrated Operation Plan (SIOP)."

At one point, both *Coral Sea* and *Lexington* were placed on DEFCON 2 status, but the average squadron member probably had no knowledge of the crisis.

Despite the serious nature of the day, the world was saved and VMA-121 managed a fun photo at NAS Cubi Point.



RIVER RATS

SCHOLARSHIP | ADVOCACY | HISTORY | CAMARADERIE

Join the River Rats and help us help you!



Has pulling all those High-G's in A-4 Skyhawk and other Navy and Marine Corps fighter and attack aircraft for years left you holding an empty bag when you talked to the VA about neck and spinal injuries? Many of us lack the supporting documentation for HIGH-G Repetitive Strain Injury (HIGH-G RSI). Follow-us - the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association (RRVA) - and help us document this issue — complete this short Survey (average of 8 minutes).

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RRVARSI>

The survey will remain open likely through the Fall 2021 to allow word of it to spread. What will we do with the survey results? Early in 2022, the RRVA Aviator Medical Issue Committee (AMIC) Flight Surgeons will evaluate the High-G RSI survey data. This should give us a good idea of the extent of the problem of High-G RSI in Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force fighter & attack aircrews stretching across 50+ years of fighter/attack aviation. This data and its story will form the case for where we go next.

We cannot stress enough the importance of your participation. The survey itself is straightforward; it does not ask for any personally

identifiable information, name, SSN, etc. Even if you flew a Gen 3, 4 and 5 aircraft and are not experiencing any back or neck issues please complete the Survey. The survey contains all the information you need to step through each question. Though Sailors & Marines depart and return to the ship and Airmen return to the beach, we always arrive over the target, a shared objective. Here, the shared objective is the High-G RSI survey and its findings. If the High-G RSI survey data indicates a correlation between neck (cervical)/back (lumbar) issues and high-G fighter/attack aviation exposure, then the AMIC's vision is to advocate for public law that leads to a VA and/or DOD study of High-G RSI in fighter/attack military aviators. The end-game of our work is service connection whereby aircrew that flew fighter & attack high-G aircraft are a recognized class with appropriate identification, tracking and treatment in the VA system. For more information visit the RRVA web site at:

<https://river-rats.org/page/medical>

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to Message me or send me an email.

Thomas "Boot" Hill tbhill1223@cox.net

NEW MEMBERS

Robert Weissberg, Langhorne, Pa

Jason Lollar, Simpsonville, Sc

Ronald Puckett, Mobile, Al

Kenneth Brust, Chestertown, Ny

Kenneth Cook, Estero, Fl

Join or renew, and give someone a one-year gift membership for \$20 more.

Contact Terry Cooney at skyhawkasn@gmail.com or at 2421 Clubside Dr., Beaver Creek, OH 45431



TINS!*

Published in Forrester's 59er Newsletter
February 1960 Mediterranean Cruise

Captain E. C. Gund, Air Force officer on exchange duty with the Navy, was returning from a mission when his A-4D's TACAN navigation gear ceased functioning. Informed of his difficulty, his wingman took over the task of locating their carrier. Shortly afterward, a flat-top was sighted, and the two planes settled into the slot.

Just before touchdown, the wingman veered away, out of the pattern. Pleased with this courtesy, Captain Gund continued down to the flight deck, while the wingman went searching for the FDR.

The carrier was *Forrester*; Captain Gund is attached to USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt*'s squadron, VA-46. "I realized where I was just before I hit the deck," the Captain said, "but by then it was too late."

Talk About a Grease Job!



While the Air Force officer enjoyed *Forrester*'s hospitality, the flight deck crew serviced the A-4D Skyhawk. Not only was the craft repaired and refueled, but great attention was given to its careful "greasing." When Captain Gund returned to his plane he found numerous indications of *Forrester* sailors'

artistic talents in grease-smeared signs which wished him "welcome aboard," and extended "greetings to the FDR."

How did Captain Gund like his brief, unintentional visit to *Forrester*? "I enjoyed my cup of coffee — even the sour cream." He said.

CHALLENGE COINS

The SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION now has its own challenge coin for sale to members and non-members alike. The price of each coin is \$15, including shipping.

US MAIL

To buy your own coin(s), mail a request to the Skyhawk Association at 10432 Button Willow Dr., Las Vegas, 89134. Include the number of coins requested and payment in the form of a check or money order made out to the Skyhawk Association.

WEBSITE (skyhawk.org)

One the Home Page, click on Association, then Ship's Store and proceed as directed.

HOOK 2021

Coins will be for sale at the Skyhawk Booth.



Skyhawks Still Flying

Summer 2021 Contractor Services Update

Hun reporting

Of the 44 *Skyhawks* we can find still flying, some 22 single seat and 4 TA's are currently flying, or are at least available to fly, in contract service. Draken remains our largest operator with 13 aircraft now in North Carolina doing JTAC. Then Top Aces with their 7 A-4N's in Germany. Doc Sugden's Teton Aviation still has a TA-4 flying for hire in the NW, Sky Resources still maintains 3 Limas as flyers in Texas and AVMATS in St Louis is caring for the remaining 2 TA-4's from Doug Matthews and Top Aces.

A-4's Still Flying!

as of March 2021

12 Military
26 Contract
6 Private

Total: 44



Full report available on Association Website



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



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

Dan Carr, 4/9/2021, Longwood, FL
Ron Cole, 5/14/2021, Islamorada, FL
Mike Ford, 4/2020
Ed Jaegar, 6/11/2020, NAS Willow Grove, PA
Jack P. Monroe, Jr, 5/12/2021 Fredericksburg, VA
James B. Morin, 7/4/2021, Tallahassee, FL
Brian O'Neil, 4/16/2021, Bainbridge Island, WA
Bill Ranson, 4/11/2021, Pensacola, FL
David Stulman, 1/31/2020, Dallas, TX
Dave Van Sciver, 2/11/2021, Pacifica, CA

Fair Winds and Following Seas "Miss Daisy"...

It is with great sadness that we find ourselves reporting the passing of one of the Association's great friends, Ms. Joan Heinemann. Daughter and 'Girl Friday' to the Douglas A-4 designer, Ed Heinemann, the *Skyhawk* and our Association were two of her favorite passions since our beginnings. With a forever smile, undiminished energy and enthusiasm for all things A-4 *Skyhawk*, she followed the aircraft and Association as best she could from her home in Sun City, CA. Joan got her call sign Miss Daisy at the A4 retirement ceremony in Pensacola where she was honored with a back seat taxi ride in a TA-4. She also joined us to celebrate the Association's 20th Anniversary at the 2013 Tailhook and renewed her old *Skyhawk* friendships regularly. She will be sorely missed by us all.

Very sadly,
Hun sends



With her Dad at the 1991 A3 Retirement Ceremony.

About to get her TA4 back seat ride in 1999.

2013 SA Board of Directors Meeting at Hook.



RIDERS ON THE STORM

Celebrating
Distinguished Flying Cross recipients
and the 30th Anniversary of Desert Storm

THE DFC SOCIETY REUNION | SEPTEMBER 23-26, 2021 | WASHINGTON D.C. info: DFCSociety.org

Hosting at Sheraton Pentagon City Hotel, Arlington VA
[Sheraton Pentagon City Hotel Registration.](#)



PHOTO: F/A-18s over USS Saratoga



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THE A-4 EVER

Skyhawk Association

Summer 2021 • Journal

Volume 27 • Number 2



Order additional patches

No flight suit/jacket should be without one of these outstanding patches. Additional quantities may be purchased for \$5.00 each (\$6 for non-members) plus \$1 postage, by sending your check or money order (no credit cards yet, sorry) payable to Skyhawk Association along with your name address and membership number (found on your card) to:

Skyhawk Patch
2421 Clubside Drive
Beavercreek, OH 45431

Join the Skyhawk Association and get a free patch

One of these outstanding patches will be included with each **new** membership. Want more than one patch? (Who doesn't?) See ordering info at left.

Memberships are **1 year - \$30** (\$35 Foreign)

3 Years - \$75 (\$90 Foreign) in US funds.

☐ New _____ Years

☐ Renewal \$ _____ Total Enclosed

YES, Sign me up! Send my patch and membership materials to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Call sign/nickname _____ A-4 hours _____ A-4 Traps _____

Skyhawk Squadrons: _____

Referred By _____

Payment may be made with personal check or with  by visiting www.skyhawk.org. Sorry, we are no longer accepting credit cards.

Join by mail: Send payment in US funds to:
Skyhawk Association
2421 Clubside Dr.
Beavercreek, OH 45431-2503

Skyhawks Do It Better!

