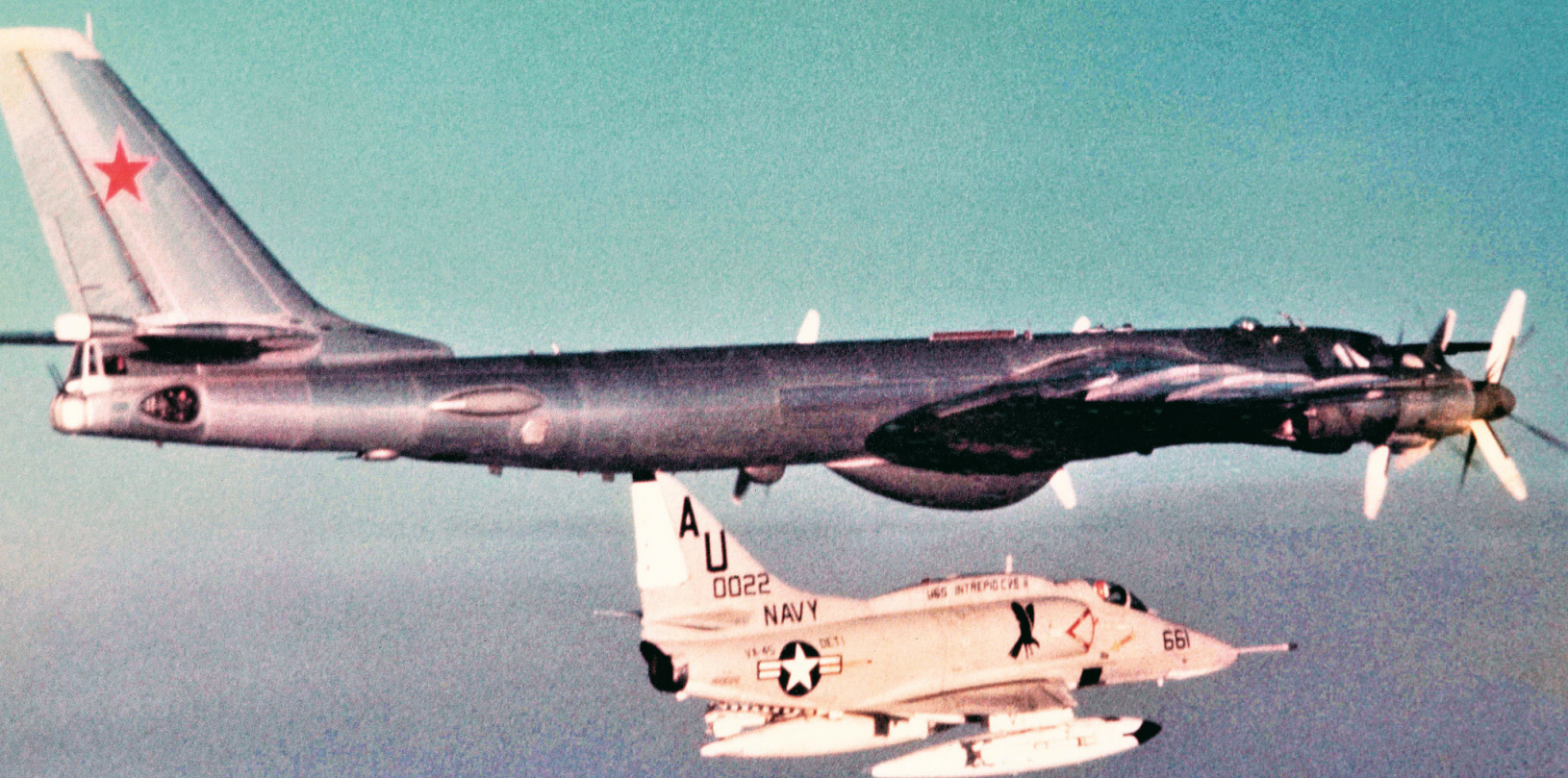


THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 28-4



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Trivia Anyone?

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From The Attic

*BOD Meeting & Reunion,
Las Vegas, NV,
March 27-30*

Winter 2022-2023

<http://skyhawk.org>



THE PREZ SEZ

By Gene "Blade" Atwell

Naval Aviation requires us to master change as our first priority. From the first shearing of locks to the "you're outta here" gift of one's DD-214, change is our "coin of the realm" as an ever-present source of irritation, joy, death and survival.

In the span of two months, the winds of change are briskly upon us at the Skyhawk Association with the appointment of three new directors and a new president. Unprecedented, one must say.

Dennis "Magic" Carroll, Steve "SOMF" Sanford and Lionel "Digger" Rotelli have accepted our "offer you can't refuse" to join our traveling circus in pursuit of perpetuating the legend of just one of the self-educated, genius Ed Heinemann's many creations, our A-4 Skyhawk. We welcome you to our board of directors with the assurance that change shall continue. (It must be noted here that all board members volunteer, pay full dues and receive no reimbursement for those dues nor their travel expenses to board meetings.)

My two-year stint as Prez began at the conclusion of 2022's luncheon held annually at Tailhook in Reno. Standing on the shoulders of those who preceded me makes my job significantly easier and I must thank George Blosser for leaving me with an extremely healthy Association.

Though not a gambler nor much of a Tailhooker because of my jarhead mollycoddling (Deck space? Marines? A-4? Fly your own selves to and from WESTPAC!), this event saved from extinction by the late John Ascuaga is well worth its annual attendance in Reno. Big change is afoot already in 2023 with Hook being held in late August and not its usual time slot in early September. I recommend you make plans to be there as soon as, well, maybe yesterday.

Our website will post information related to registration and hotels once we receive them from The Tailhook Association, to include our usual discount. Our Attack Ready Room at Hook is like no other Ready Room you've ever experienced.

Updating your changing email with our secretary, Terry Cooney, and treasurer, Mark Williams, at a4join@a4skyhawk.org, will ensure you are kept abreast of all information we deem important enough to email while also allowing you to access the hidden gems of our website. No, we do not now nor will we ever sell our confidential list of personal emails and we don't send out spam.

Any vision for our future is my dilemma in that I hate change and can't stand things the way they are:

- Number One on the docket will be to increase the viability of our organization for the long term because we're literally dying off as we haven't yet found a method to live forever. Having already raised this prospect as a board member and seen some resistance, I know we'll be able to bridge our differences once we realize the stakes if we don't embrace that hated change.
- Secondly, now wearing my webmaster hat while on my bully pulpit, we need to change and find a permanent home for our website, which is the repository of so much A-4 specific information that we're not completely sure what's truly available. That's the reason we turned to a content management system years ago trying to harness all of our information and we need helper bees.
- From that last statement, thirdly, we need more members participating in change by becoming more involved. "Involved HOW?" one may ask? I'm glad you asked:
 - Reach out to old squadron mates and ask them to rejoin or join for the first time. No, embarrass them to please join.
 - Volunteer to work on the website and we'll teach you everything you need to know.
 - Plead with your bosses and ask them to please sponsor our website/association or donate usable assets such as shared server storage, cloud computing space or the like.
 - Send in your stories, reminisces, TINS or just plain old lies to our Journal editor, Dave Dollarhide, at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net to be published in our quarterly publication you're currently reading online. Our Journal has three additional quarterly publications which are in glossy print with photos so Marines like me can put our crayons away.
 - Go back to the top and repeat.

Blade sends! ✈️



Gene "Blade" Atwell



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Winter 2022-2023 •

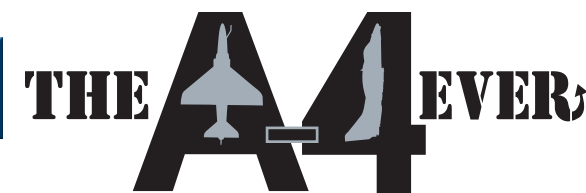
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Contributions

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 magazine. Contributions may be emailed to the Journal Editor at sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.net. Stephanie Davis, graphics, msleefi@gmail.com. Paper issues printed by Acculink, Greenville, NC.

On the Cover: VA-45 Det-1 Skyhawk intercepts a Tu-95 Bear in 1972.
Photo from John "Bear" Hildebrandt – US Navy photo.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org

■ **From: Randy “Cactus” Claybourn**
Subject: Bob “Raven” Hickerson’s Death

I got the word about Bob. Super Dude, skilled Aviator, great Leader, I don’t think I ever heard him raise his voice and I worked with him and for him several times, the last time in (VMA)214 in 81. Hoping when you hear of the Memorial plan you can advise. I for one, plan to be in what is sure to be a “full house” memorial/celebration of a remarkable life lived.

From: Steve “Somf” Sanford

Raven was already in VMA-214 when I arrived in January of 1969. He preceded me to Chu Lai by several months and by the time I got there he was already up at Danang doing the FASTFAC thing. I had my last A-4 flight in February of 1991 in a section of A-4 Super Fs with Raven when he had MAG-42 at Alameda. Raven was the ultimate professional. He was always a pleasure to be around. He will be missed.

■ **From: Michael Donnellan**
Subject: Electromagnetic Radio Microwave Radiation Exposure

As an aviation electrician, I worked on the A4 Skyhawk attack aircraft on all models in the Marines.

I received a letter from the Department of Defense (warning) approximately 5 years after my discharge, that if you worked within 5 feet of the nose of the aircraft when the avionics and radar were engaged, you can experience physical organ damage to testicles and other organs. It proved to be true for me.

Other veterans I have contacted and talked with were that it was a known fact that if you [sic] this you are cooked. The [sic] Radar was AN/APG-53A, radio altimeter AN/APN-141.

From: Dave Dollarhide

You mention the APG-53 Radar and the APN-141 Radar Altimeter. There was also a Radar Beacon in some airplanes called APN-154 to extend coverage of ground Radars. I do remember being told to never activate the Radar (APG-53) on the ground with people in front of the airplane.

(If you have any comments for Michael, his email is ambassador46@gmail.com - Ed)

■ **From: From: Young “Juice” Lucy**
Subject: Dead Men Flying

I just read this book by Mike “Mule” Mullane and it is simply outstanding. He flew three combat tours in Vietnam in the A-4E. I have not seen it reviewed in the A-4Ever yet. Did I miss it? Please put in a plug for this book ASAP!

From: Dave Dollarhide

Dennis Carroll wrote a very nice review on Mule’s *Dead Men Flying* in issue 28-1, Spring, 2022. I also read the book and loved how he told us exactly what he was thinking and experiencing. I agree with you and will post your comments in the Letters to Editor section of the coming winter issue. That’s the digital issue that will remain on our website home-page for all of 2023.

■ **From: Ryan Campbell**
Subject: VT-7 1971-1973 Patch

My father was an aviation electrician with VT-7 during his enlistment. He was in from 1970-1973, and I was just wondering which patch was correct for his time with the squadron. Any help would be much appreciated as I am trying to create a special Christmas gift. Thank you.

From: Dave Dollarhide

On the VT-7 home page, below the many patches, is a description of each,

but they don’t seem to be in order with the displayed patches. However, using a process of elimination, I only see three patches for the squadron, shown below. Left to right, the first was from 1961. The second two are the same, just different quality, but number two shows a 1972 date. The rest of the patches are for special deployments/events. The best choice is the second one, with the eagle logo from 1972, but I’ve copied the VT-7 “SDO” Bud Southworth for verification.



■ **From: From: Gary Verver**
Subject: Flat Hat



Flat Hatting: “flying an airplane low and recklessly.” (As if flying low enough that only people wearing flat hats could escape being struck.)

I was issued one in boot camp, didn’t know it was a safety item, OSHA would’ve been pleased

■ **From: Rocky B. Shaw Sgt USMC**
H&MS-31 Hydraulics Shop 71-73

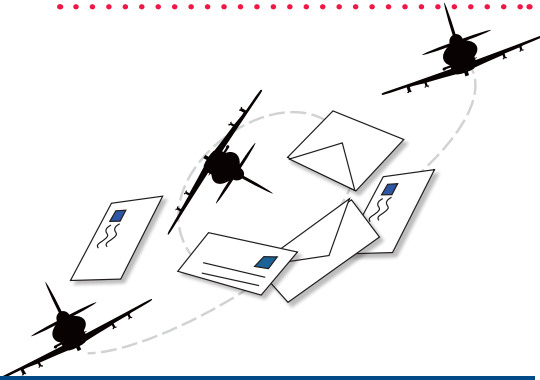
Gentlemen, I am searching for information on LtCol James Skinner who was killed on 23 September 1972 on Grytoya Island, Norway along with 4 other Marines during Operation Strong Express. They were on a Huey from HML-167 out of New River, NC. He was assigned to H&MS-31 about May/June of 1972. Any information would be greatly appreciated.

From: Dave Dollarhide

There were no hits here at the Skyhawk Assn. for LtCol Skinner. We wish you the best in your search. I will place your email in our next issue as a letter to editor, so if there is any response, I’ll get back to you.

From: Rocky B. Shaw

Thank you sir for your research. We are in touch with his family. Please keep us posted on any new developments. shawr466@yahoo.com



NEW MEMBERS

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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

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

Read?

you think
we read?

Review of three books with the A-4 and its pilots

By Peter Mersky

A series of reviews on books concerning Israeli Air Force pilots. Each review will be published in three sequential issues of the A-4Ever Skyhawk Journal - Editor



Peter Mersky has written 17 books on military aviation, including the first book outside Israel on IAF aces. Besides many magazine articles, he has reviewed some 800 books for various publications, as well as his own regular (since 1982) column for *Naval Aviation News*, the Navy's oldest periodical. He is also a retired reserve commander as well as a former editor of *Approach*, the Navy's aviation safety magazine.

INTRODUCTION

An enthusiastic group of the members of the *A-4 Skyhawk Association* visited Israel in 2017. Memories of the trip are still strong. Meeting such successful Israel Air Force (IAF) A-4 drivers was a unique experience. Several now-retired IAF aviators have written their biographies, including MGen Giora Romm and BGen Iftach Spector, both aces. General Romm became Israel's first ace with five kills in two days during the 1967 Six-Day war, while General Spector gained 12 confirmed kills in *three* flying Mirage IIIs and F-4s.

General Romm (then a captain) was shot down in a Mirage on September 11, 1969, and was imprisoned by the Egyptians for a little more than three months under deplorable conditions. Injured during his ejection from his stricken Mirage, his wounds were never properly mended. But, after his repatriation—with a warning from his captors that if he returned to the cockpit and flew against them, they would not be so understanding—he was soon a major and in command of No. 115 Squadron, flying A-4Ns, export variants of the Marine A-4M variant. There was a lot to learn about flying his new aircraft

but there was no time. The Arabs attacked on October 6, 1973, the start of the so-called Yom Kippur War, the date being the most holy of all of the Hebrew calendar.

In 2014, General Romm's memoir *Solitary* was published. It is an intensely personal account of his brief, but life-changing time as a POW. After his repatriation, he served as the Deputy Commander of the IAF and is now enjoying his retirement but still keeps in touch with the IAF and the men he flew alongside.

BGen Spector flew Mirage IIIs, gaining kills as the CO of 101 Squadron during the so-called War of Attrition, which involved Soviet Russian "volunteers" in 1970. The Soviets' performance both in the air and on the ground was lackluster. Relations with their Egyptian "hosts" left a lot to be desired as far as the Egyptians were concerned. The Russians went home and the Egyptians and their Arab allies began preparing for their next attempt at pushing Israel into the Mediterranean Sea.

Spector joined newly-established 107 Squadron as their CO, racking up more kills in their F-4s. After his

command tour in Phantoms, and as the brigadier general base commander of Tel Nof Air Base, Spector flew A-4Ns with Nos. 115 and 116 Squadrons, on day and night missions often against the treacherous SA-6 batteries arrayed against the Israelis, which he describes in *Loud and Clear*. A painter of note as well as an author, his somewhat autobiographical novel *A Dream in Blue and Black*, was published in Israel but has yet to come out in a full English edition. A rather truncated edition is available online under the title of *Phantoms Over Israel*. His deeply personal account of his career in the IAF at war, *Loud and Clear* is reviewed here.

After he retired, General Spector traveled occasionally, spending time here in the U.S., but then settled into the pursuit of his PhD, for which he is currently finishing the last portions.

Our third book, *Israeli A-4 Skyhawk Units in Combat*, is by Israeli author, Shlomo Aloni, who has written several books and magazine articles on the IAF. This book is right down our alley, and was published by the prolific company, Osprey, in 2009, with the IAF's A-4 as its dedicated subject.

REVIEW #1

SOLITARY:

The Crash, Captivity and Comeback of an Ace Fighter Pilot.

Author: Romm, Giora.

Black Irish Entertainment LLC, New York, Los Angeles. 2014.
287 pp. Paperback. \$13.76.

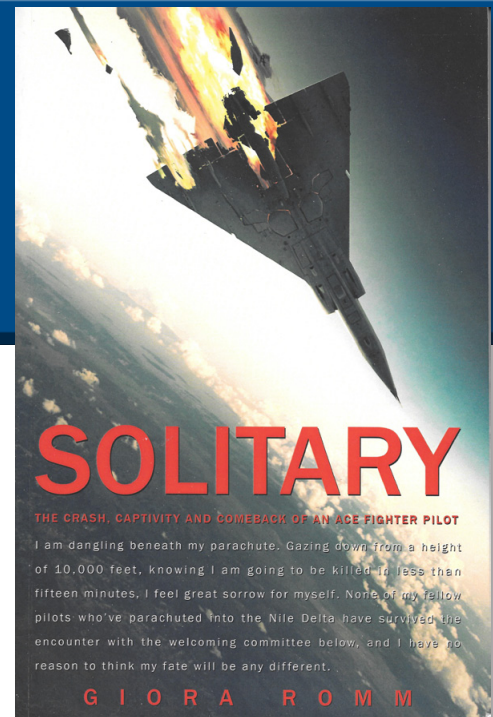
Most combat veterans of any country have one important fear, something that sometimes occurs, no matter how they prepare to defend against it: namely, capture by the enemy and imprisonment for a long duration. In the mid- to late 20th century, there were many examples of such incredibly ill fortune, especially during the Vietnam War, roughly 1964-1973, where hundreds of Americans, mainly aviators, were incarcerated in North Vietnam for painfully long periods, often as long as five to eight years. Beaten and tortured almost to the point of death, losing 50-100 or more pounds from the meager rations, these individuals had to reach way down inside to survive, and a few could not, dying in the solitary confines of the infamous Hanoi Hilton, or other prisons of the North Vietnamese system. The occasional Medals of Honor, Air Force and Navy Crosses, Silver Stars and Purple Hearts given to those men who flew home in March 1973 were small compensation for the tragedies they suffered at the hands of their captors. Yet, while these stalwarts languished in North Vietnamese Prisons, other captives were experiencing the same torturous existence.

Then-Captain (later Major General) Giora Romm of the Israel Air Force had already seen a lot of action, becoming Israel's first fighter ace during the 1967 Six Day War. He had shot down five Egyptian and Syrian MiGs during that brief, but intense conflict that surprised the world. On September 11, 1969, a date which, of course, would come to have its own tragic meaning for most of the world 32 years later, Romm's Mirage IIICJ was struck by an Egyptian MiG's cannon fire over Egypt, and he

had to eject at 20,000 feet—an unusually high, and potentially dangerous altitude for such an emergency egress.

He was badly injured and as he floated down, he realized he was heading into more danger directly toward a growing group of angry Egyptian farmers and their welcome was not going to be pleasant. After several intense moments of confrontation where he feared for his life, he was rescued by Egyptian army troops to begin what developed into a lengthy, often painful and highly uncertain stay at an unclean facility. Not only was there the expected language problem—Hebrew and Arabic occasionally have minor similarities but are, in fact, two entirely different languages—there was also the obvious animosity between two cultures. None of which was going to help the young Israeli pilot as he struggled to maintain his dignity and security against the constant barrage of questions from the harsh, insistent Egyptian officers.

Romm is not the usual tough-minded, fast-acting fighter pilot, though he does have those qualities in abundance. He is also more cerebral, someone always questioning, searching for reasons, the order of the world around him and why things happen. This highly personal memoir covers a very specific five-month period in his eventful life enduring all the physical and mental hardships associated with this most stressful of military experiences. We Americans have focused on the experiences of our own POWs in Vietnam and to a lesser extent—perhaps because there were not as many of them in a much shorter time span—of those men and women captured during the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent conflicts



in Iraq and Afghanistan. We might tend to forget that other countries' warriors have experienced much the same situation. Cut off from their homes and cultures, desperately trying to survive and cope with the harsh realities of dealing with harsh jailers who seem to care very little about their safety or very existence.

Romm is a very private man, and to write these extremely personal stories of his medical and physical torture at the hands of the Egyptians must have taken a great deal of intestinal fortitude that he himself didn't know he had. There's very little aviation association here, except for the fact that he is constantly reminding himself that he is an officer in the Israel Air Force, an "Ace" no less, and it is up to only himself to maintain that dignity even though his personal appearance and mental state may not seem to support that hard-won status.

This account offers a simple narrative that only occasionally describes the author's life and family history. He does occasionally give some details in those areas, and they are certainly welcome. Romm is a *sabra*, a native-born Israeli, whose father left Poland in 1925 at the tender age of 19, came to Israel and

continued...



Romm in a *Mirage*.

made a life for himself and his family in Palestine, as the area was collectively known then. Snippets of his family history and his own education and early career in the IAF round out Giora Romm's history as he takes us with him on his painful journey as a POW.

His language is straight forward and colorful. He is, after all, definitely bilingual, able to converse in English as well as Hebrew, having spent considerable time in the U.S. in a variety of assignments, including the Israeli Defense Attache, the senior military representative in the embassy, second only to the ambassador, in the 1990s.

Much of the narrative revolves around the daily contest between Romm and his guards, his struggle to maintain his officer identity, while trying to get medical attention and adequate food, as well as a meeting with a Red Cross representative if only to get word back to his family that he is alive. He is severely beaten by what he guesses is a "Sudanese giant," a huge, powerful individual.

Then, on December 6, 1969, he is transported to a facility from which he is released into the hands of another Red Cross official and ultimately brought home to his anxious family and friends and country, where he is feted as a returning hero. He begins rehabilitation, all the while focusing on returning to flight status, something those around him are not sure he will be able to accomplish. But he does, in time to participate in the 1973 Yom Kippur War as the commanding officer of an A-4 squadron. Not unexpectedly, the Egyptians have learned that Romm is once more in the cockpit, flying against them, and they broadcast an angry message to tell him they are waiting for him. This time, they say, their reception will not be as "benevolent" as the first.

Romm's description of flying the A-4, a much different aircraft from his delta-winged Mirage, and learning to lead his squadron of eager young men in an increasingly bloody and intense war appears rather suddenly. It is only

after he takes a long, hard look at himself and how he feels that he is able to settle into the assignment given him by high-ranking IAF officers who are also his friends and now need his help, his personality, his experience. This last section certainly gives a lot of details about flying in the 1973 war that have never been offered in other such memoirs. It is well worth reading.

Solitary is the story of one man's journey from the literal heights of flying at 20,000 feet in pursuit of his country's enemies to the equally literal and very personal depths of the type of incarceration relatively—thankfully—few men have had to experience. It is a journey worth taking because it allows the reader the chance to safely participate in both the capture and ultimate liberation of the soul and physical well-being of a tiny country's patriot.

Reviewed by Peter Mersky CDR (USNR-Ret)



Grampaw Pettibone – In the Blind

Naval Aviation News

December, 1967

Two Skyhawk drivers were scheduled for a live Bullpup (air-to-ground missile) shoot, this being the first for both pilots. The briefing covered all aspects of the flight. In addition, the flight leader included a short discourse on simulated air-to-air combat just in case another aircraft could be found to pounce upon after the missile shoot. The wingman, who had limited experience in air-to-air combat, was assigned to flying wing on the leader in combat formation provided they were fortunate enough to find some prey.

The flight launched without incident and proceeded to the target, but they encountered a delay while the target was being cleared. After orbiting for 40 minutes, the flight was cleared in and they commenced their runs. Each pilot completed four dummy runs and fired on the fifth. The leader brought the section down across the target to assess the damage. Upon departing the area, he spotted a section of A-6 Intruders.

The section of Intruders, unaware of the aggressive Skyhawks, separated and commenced individual climbs. The A-4 leader called for combat formation and took off in pursuit of the closest A-6. After arriving at the A-6's six o'clock position, the "Hawk" leader pulled alongside and flew wing until the A-6 driver noticed him. Neither A-4 driver expected a hassle to develop and both were surprised to see the A-6 accelerate suddenly and pull away.

The Skyhawk flight leader tailed in behind the A-6 and followed him through a turn to port and a reversal to starboard. The wingman, meanwhile, maintained proper position trailing his leader as briefed.

At this point in time, all three aircraft were nose down, passing through 14,000 feet and accelerating through 380 knots. The next move was abrupt. The A-6 turned hard to port and the A-4 section leader overshot, going well outside the turn radius. His wingman, being further aft, was able to match the turn.

The wingman, noting his leader had overshot, pressed the attack on the A-6 from his advantageous position and subsequently lost visual contact with the section leader. As this development transpired, the wingman in hot pursuit, announced loud and clear that he had the lead. The leader did not receive the transmission and assumed his wingman would continue flying the briefed wing position.

At this time in the encounter, neither A-4 pilot had visual contact with the other. Both thought they had the lead and both continued the determined attack on the A-6. The A-4s were in a nose-down, steeply banked port turn, the wingman above and in line with the section leader. The leader tightened the turn by pulling additional Gs and the A-4's made contact.

The two aircraft became uncontrollable immediately following the collision. The drivers ejected without further ado. Luckily, they were over an uninhabited area. Both pilots enjoyed highly successful ejections and received no more than minor injuries.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Great balls of fire! Aggressiveness is a highly desired trait in an aviator, but when an experienced fella like this puts his neck and that of his wingman on the choppin' block, that's goin' a wee bit too far. There's nothing wrong with some healthy air-to-air tactics when they are briefed beforehand and played by the rules.

P.S. I'll bet these fellas really scared the daylights out of the A-6 driver.

Illustrated by Osborn

(An easy going debrief by Pettibone. :-) – Ed)



THE RESCUERS

"LEAVE NO MAN BEHIND"



A belated tribute to those who stood in harm's way while rescuing downed American airmen. One dramatic story

By Lt Robert Franklin, robertwfranklin@comcast.net, F-4 pilot and rescue participant.

On December 27, 1969, two Marine Corps pilots took off in a TA-4 Skyhawk from Da Nang Air Base, South Vietnam on a combat mission in Laos. While in a ninety-degree bank and at a speed of over 420 knots their aircraft was hit by heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire. The Marines were forced to eject over one of the most dangerous and heavily defended areas of the "Ho Chi Minh Trail."

During the next 23 hours a dramatic rescue attempt would begin involving hundreds of men and dozens of aircraft. If they were not picked up soon, they would surely perish at the hands of enemy soldiers. Because of the extraordinary planning, skill and bravery of those who took part, the rescue was a success. This is the story of that rescue.

1969-70 The Air War Moves South

In late 1969, the Vietnam war was dragging on. President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, were looking for a means of winding down and ending the war.

Peace talks were going on in Paris and a full bombing lull was called in North Vietnam to encourage the parties to negotiate. But the North Vietnamese took secret advantage of this "lull" to move a large number of anti-aircraft weapons out the north to position them

along their vital supply route, known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Thus, in 1969-70 the air war moved out of North Vietnam to the "Trail."

The trail was an elaborate system of hidden mountain roads, trails, tunnels, and river fords used to infiltrate troops and war supplies into South Vietnam via Laos and Cambodia. Every night tons of material, weapons, guns, rockets would move southward in a never-ending flow. By late 1969 the

trail could accommodate heavy trucks in some sections supplying the needs of several hundred thousand regular North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops active in South Vietnam.

A major effort by the US was interdicting the supply line that fueled the war. Military air bases in South Vietnam and Thailand launched hundreds of daily missions trying to slow down the supply movement that was critical to the NVA war strategy.

Marine Corps Major Rick Lewis and 1st Lt Paul Phillips were based in Da Nang, Vietnam flying with the "Playboys," an all-volunteer, "fast-mover," attack and FAC-A (Forward Air Control - Airborne) squadron. The Playboys of H&MS-11 were considered by many to be one of the most successful air operations of the war. They specialized in working the "Steel Tiger" area in eastern Laos that extended for several hundred miles north and south of the DMZ along the western border of Vietnam. This area was a heavily defended choke point along the Ho Chi Minh trail

Flying the two-seat Douglas TA-4F Skyhawk, they would operate either alone or with fighter aircraft interdicting enemy supply routes. Oftentimes this would be Marine Corps F-4 Phantoms to locate and destroy enemy truck parks, fuel and supply areas, AAA gun batteries, mortar and rocket positions. They might also provide communications links between strike aircraft and ground troops.

Col Larry Wood, a Marine Pilot, callsign "Nickel," describes what it was like flying with the Playboys

"We specialized in working the Steel Tiger area of operation where each Playboy had his own area. We had two map books in the airplane. The guy in front had a 1/100 tactical map and the guy in back a 1/50, just like the grunts used. There were points on the map labeled Delta 11, 12, 38, etc. They coincided with easily recognizable terrain features like the bicycle seat, a bend in the river that looked like a bicycle seat and known as Delta 11. It was on highway 9, which went from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh to Tchepone in Laos, (pronounced 'Shapone'). Military squadrons such as Hillsboro, Misty, Nail, Wolf etc., all used the same points. Delta 38 was a karst 20 miles north of the 'bicycle seat'

The Skyhawks front seat pilot flew and navigated mostly by memory. There was a TACAN (navigation aid) in Laos on a mountain but at low altitude it wasn't much good so each one of the Playboys needed to know his area by memory.



Barrel Roll and Steel Tiger Sectors Spring 1965

Hillsboro was the 24-hour Airborne Command and Control Center (ABCCC) flying a four engine C-130 Hercules. They kept track of who was in the area. They provided attack aircraft when requested and were tasked to know where everyone was located. The Playboys flew there often, knew the terrain and what the NVA movements were. A new Playboy on the first few flights might get excited to find a big truck park along highway 9 only to realize that all the trucks were dead.

Playboys did not fly night missions per se but they sometimes extended past twilight into night.

Flying around in the dark with your lights off over Laos could be more than exciting, as well as dangerous. Marine A-6 Intruders were out there, making night attacks using new doppler radar. Out in the Steel Tiger were numerous other Air Force units such as 'Blind Bat,' a C-130 Flare ship, 'Spooky' a C-47 or C130 Gunship. 'Misty' an F-100 fast FAC, and 'Nail' an OV-10 FAC -- all racing around in the dark.

The last Playboy flight of the day would carry a flare pod on the center line rack. If you thought something was down there, you could light it up with flares. Remember, ground gets dark but airplanes, especially with nice shiny white paint on the bottom, show up pretty good.

We were escorted on some flights, frequently flying double cycles involving a trip to the tanker. The single cycle flights (dawn and dusk) were not escorted. VMFA-542, a Marine F-4 squadron was based in Da Nang, so we briefed and planned together. Several 542 pilots flew with the Playboys as well.

continued...



"Playboy" TA-4 Skyhawk – Photo from Pilot Mike Eberhardt, Collins Foundation



North Vietnam AAA gun crew

The normal ordnance load was 5" Zuni WP rockets (white phosphorus smoke) and Zuni HE (high explosive) rockets and sometimes flares. The escorts carried 500lb bombs, Rockeye and/or CBU specialized ordnance. During one month our eight airplanes took more hits than some helo squadrons. Being a Playboy was not always that much fun. One pilot had a small-arm round come through the right side of the front seat canopy and exited out the left side canopy in the rear seat. Yippee!

Finding guns was easier at night unless you were the target, then you were busy jinking. The poor guy in the back seat couldn't see much because the airplane was maneuvering rather erratically on purpose.

We didn't carry bombs. The idea was to keep your speed up (at least 400 knots) and keep moving in a random pattern to prevent grunt gunner tracking. I'm not sure how well that all worked. They knew you were following a road somewhat and would barrage fire small arms to see if they could get lucky. If someone was on the ground (i.e., Paul and Rick), or attacking a target, then the big boys would shoot aimed fire. They also knew if the attack aircraft were ammo minus then they'd shoot at them coming off target. It amazed me to see an aircraft come off target and fly straight ahead without jinking after dropping their last ordnance. That's how another F-4 got hit during Rick and Paul's rescue."

Into the jaws of the "Steel Tigers"

Major Lewis and Lt. Phillips briefed their Playboy flight at 1500L in the H&MS ready room. The FRAG (operation order) showed mission number 825 for a VR (Visual Reconnaissance). "Playboy 16" was the callsign to be used on their flight. Scheduled takeoff was 1645–1700 local, with a planned recovery at 1830. Official sunset was 1824. At a latitude of 16 degrees north there is very little twilight time.

Their planned reconnaissance starting point was just south of Xepon, a dangerous choke point heavily guarded with every multiple caliber AAA gun in the NVA inventory.

AAA (Not the Friendly Auto Assn.)

By 1969 NVA weapon movement to the trail was peaking. Highly maneuverable rapid-firing AAA (Anti-Aircraft Artillery) guns such as the 12.7mm and 14.5mm ZPUs were raising havoc. All of them were deadly but perhaps the most lethal were the 37mm and 23mm guns.

North Vietnam acquired more than 2,000 37mm guns from the Soviet Union and another 300 to 500 of a Chinese variant. The 37mm was fired over an open gun sight. A manual range predictor determined the target range and altitude and when to open fire. An entire six-gun battery would mass its fire against an aircraft. It fired 180 rpm for short bursts and had a sustained rate of fire of 80 rpm. Maximum horizontal range was 8,000 meters but could reach a target at an altitude of 19,000 feet. The 37mm gun was deadly to any aircraft interdicting the trail.



OV-10

The equally deadly 23mm gun consisted of two 23mm cannons on a twin-wheel carriage. A single gunner aimed at the target over an open sight. A loader fed the weapon from 50-round belts to produce a sustained rate of fire of 200 rpm. It had a maximum rate of 1,000 rpm per barrel, but few engagements lasted more than 15 seconds. Target altitudes ranged from 16,000 and 1,500 feet, respectively. A four-gun battery operated by patient gunners would wait to open fire at a range of about 1,000 meters. It was at this range that Playboy 16 was tragically hit.

The "Nail" Forward Air Controllers

Besides Playboy, other FACs patrolled the Steel Tiger, notably the "Nails." They were part of the 23rd TASS (Tactical Air Support Squadron), based in Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Thailand, located on the eastern border of Thailand. Early on, Nail FACs flew slow and vulnerable single engine Cessna O-1 and O-2 "Bird Dogs," but by late 1969 they were being replaced by the North American Rockwell OV-10A "Bronco," an armor-plated aircraft initially developed by the Marine Corps as a light armed reconnaissance aircraft. The faster twin-engine turboprop Bronco was a godsend for the Nails.

Not only did they direct airstrikes on enemy supply activity, they were a critical and indispensable element in the rescue of downed airmen. When a rescue encountered enemy fire, Nail FACs were often called in to identify and direct airstrikes to suppress them. They were trained and experienced to do this and no team did this better than Nail. For 23 hours they would play a critical role for Playboy 16.

Two hours before Playboy 16 launched from Da Nang, Air Force Captain Herb Pounds, Nail 45, launched from his base at NKP. His destination was the Steel Tiger sector which included Tchepone.

Another Nail FAC, Captain Ron Russell, Nail 37, was also planning a launch that evening to work the Steel Tiger area. Ron had been a "Sector FAC" since June of '69. His area of expertise was the Mu Gia pass area, a very hot choke point on the trail which he knew very well. But, on this night, Russell would be diverted to assist with a rescue.

Pounds had been working his sector for several hours when Playboy 16 checked into the area. Pounds reported to Hillsborough that he had a new target just south of Xepon.

Hillsboro then directed Playboy to join him for a coordinated attack. Shortly after their join up, Pounds cleared Playboy in "hot" on the specific target. Almost immediately an enemy 23mm AAA battery opened up and hit the Skyhawk rendering it uncontrollable, forcing the crew to eject.

Major Rick Lewis' describes getting hit

"We were coming down part of the road called 'the Banana.' We normally tried to keep our speed at about 420 knots. We were hit while in about a 90-degree bank. The airplane was going pretty fast. I tried to move the controls but they were frozen. I gave a brief radio transmission and then quickly said ejecting!"

Paul asked me to wait because his feet weren't on the rudder pedals, but it was too late. I could hear Paul yell when his chute opened. His knee was pulled out of the socket and the other wasn't much better"

continued...



HC-130H refueling 'Jolly Green' rescue helicopters

Captain Pounds Remembers

"I saw Playboy 16 get hit and both pilots eject. I followed the parachutes to the ground. It was dusk and the ground was pretty barren because of constant bombing." Before the next day was over, Pounds would play a crucial role in the rescue of not just two, but four Marine pilots.

Hillsboro got Nail 45 and Playboy 16's ejection alert and immediately passed SAR (Search and Rescue) control to "King," an HC-130H aircraft also based in Nakhon Phanom. King began operating as the Search and Rescue command ship.

The HC-130H was a specially modified four-engine turboprop equipped with both a command/control center and aerial refueling capability. As an airborne tanker it could refuel aircraft participating in a rescue, mainly the HH-3 and HH-53 "Jolly Green Giant" rescue helicopters.

Since Nail 45 was on-scene, Captain Pounds took control of the rescue until the arrival of "Sandy 5," an A1 Skyraider, assigned to the 602nd Special Operations Squadron of the 56th Special Operations Wing assigned to Nakhon Phanom.

Following protocol, the downed airmen would be given new designations. Major Lewis' would be "Playboy 16 Alpha" and Lt. Phillips, "Playboy 16 Bravo."

Captain Pounds

"I talked to one or both of the survivors and remember telling them to get off their emergency radios and to get away from their parachutes and to hide as best they could. Playboy Alpha told me that there were not many good hiding spots because there were not many trees. He was much calmer than I would have been had the situation been reversed. I remember that Bravo was hurt"

After dusk, Nail 45 and Sandy 5 began to intentionally draw enemy fire to pinpoint and record gun locations to be mapped for the morning SAR. Both pilots planned to be the first on-station in the morning.

Captain Pounds

"I stayed on site much longer than normal after dark near Tchepone just to try to comfort them. I was getting 'hosed down' more than normal because I was maintaining a lower altitude. I think they were firing the 14.5mm and/or 12.7mm very rapid fire. I assured them that we would be back to get them out at first light, then I headed back to NKP because of low fuel."

Before leaving, Nail 45 passed control to Nail 37, Captain Russell, who had been diverted to the area by "King." The survivors were hiding on the west bank of the Se' Bang Hieng River that ran through Xepon. Russell was flying beneath a thin overcast under a bright moon that illuminated the terrain below. He could see that the NVA had encircled the survivors' positions by the number of surrounding campfires. The moon showed the river as a 300-meter-wide twisting black road.

Captain Russell

"Because of the campfires, it was clear to me the NVA were turning the survivors into a flak trap. I called 'King,' the SAR ABCCC, on secure frequency and asked for a night extraction. I knew I could guide a Jolly up the river from the south, right to the survivors. The chance of ground fire, of course, was there, although I had seen none, but a blacked out, low flying helicopter might have been heard, but not seen, especially with me mixing in my prop sounds."

(King denied Russell's request as "too risky," most likely because the survivors were separated and one of them injured.)

"I told King about the probable flak trap and that the SAR would be much more difficult the next morning, when they planned the daylight extraction. The Nail who relieved me was delayed for maintenance, so I was very low on fuel when I finally could leave the survivors. I briefed the next Nail on everything I had seen and proposed, then left the SAR patrol to him. I returned to NKP about midnight."

A War Stops -- A Rescue Begins

During the Vietnam War when an aircrewman was shot down by enemy fire, the air order of battle shifted. The war effectively stopped as it became urgent to act. All efforts were then directed to getting the crew safely out of harm's way. The NVA had no facilities to care for prisoners and as a result only a handful ever made it to a prison in Hanoi. Over 500 MIAs were reported lost in Laos. Most would die or be executed.

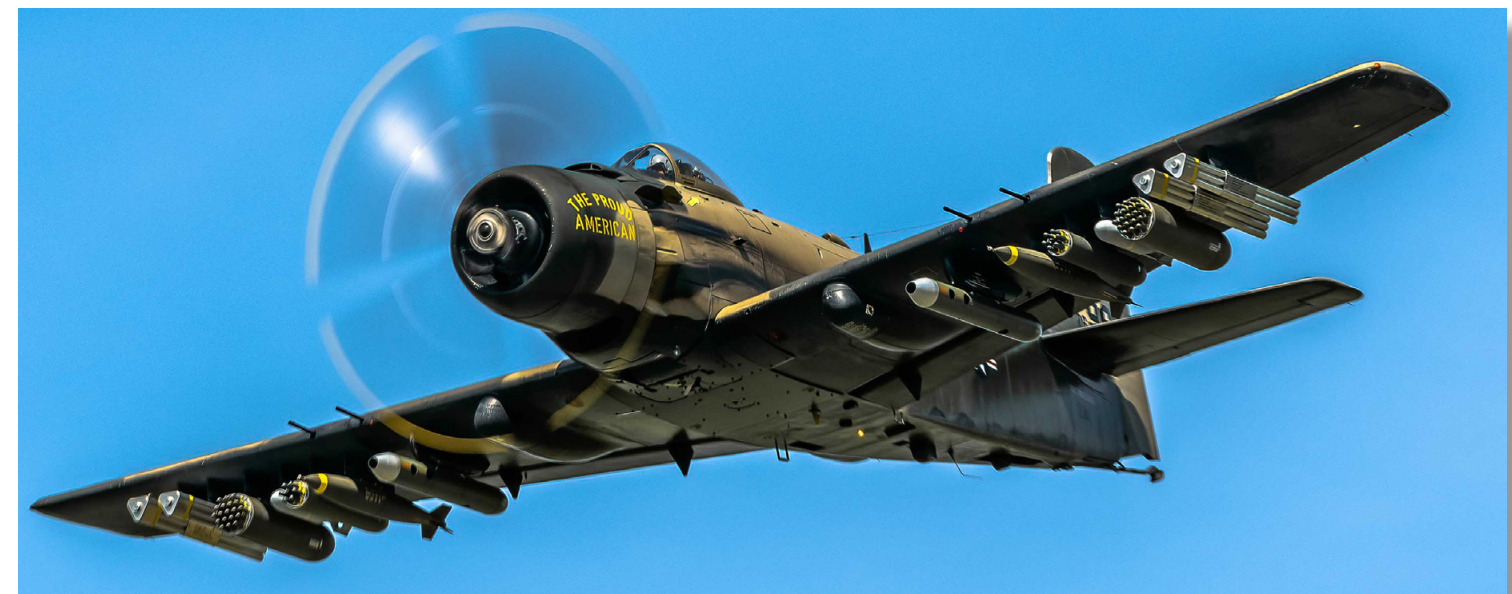
King could order any assets needed to affect a rescue. Sandy 5 was the first Skyraider directed to the rescue site. Along with Nail 45 they established communication with the downed airmen and began evaluating the area for hostile forces, especially AA guns. Other Sandys would be later be ordered to escort and protect the helicopters.

That morning two HH-3 rescue helicopters were ordered and launched from NKP. The SAR commander also began ordering strike aircraft to suppress enemy guns and ground forces.

"Jolly Green Giants" & "Spads" begin to stir

King also began alerting units of the 37th ARRS (Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service), the 23rd TASS (Tactical Air Support Squadron) in NKP and the 40th ARRS in Udorn, Thailand.

Miles to the west at the Udorn Royal Thailand Air Force base, Mike Kinsinger was co-pilot of an HH-53 "Super Jolly Green Giant" of the 40th ARRS. Mike and his crew got word that they had an early morning "first light" briefing for a potential SAR operation in Laos.



The venerable A-1 Skyraider – Photo provided by Chris Parameter, Heritage Flight Museum

During the night Nail attempted to direct the "Alpha" survivor to join "Bravo's" position. Rick attempted to crawl toward Paul, several hundred meters away but fell into an unoccupied AAA gun pit in the dark and decided that was a bad idea. Paul laid suffering in excruciating pain. He had no pain killer or morphine and could not crawl, let alone walk. He spent the night on his back holding his 9mm pistol cocked and resting on his chest, determined to be moved only by friendly forces or not at all.

The night of the 27th as told to Col. Wood

"The story of Rick crawling through the darkness to get to Paul was related to me (and the rest of the Playboys) when he got back from Thailand after their rescue. He said he tried to crawl to Paul in the dark but fell into an unoccupied AAA pit and decided that was a bad idea. When he got to Paul the next morning, he found Paul laying on his back with his 9mm on his chest. Rick said he'd have probably shot me if I came upon him in the dark."

In the morning, he did go get Paul's chute and staked it out on the ground, and the two stayed on it so the Sandys could see them. He said there was a Nail FAC overhead them all night. When the first Sandy got there, he asked the Nail if he'd seen any flak that night, Nail said 'no.' Rick said that the gunners had been shooting at him all night but just didn't get the correct lead on him so the rounds were behind Nail. Flying a small spotter plane in Laos was even crazier than being a Misty or a Playboy."

A "Spad" called "Sandy"

Nail 45 and Sandy 5 returned to the site at first light. Sandy was now designated "Sandy One" as the on-scene commander. Together they began to run airstrikes on the AA artillery positions they'd mapped overnight.

In almost all Search and Rescues in southeast Asia, the most significant players were often the A-1 Skyraiders, affectionately known as "Spads." They are best remembered for their on-scene control of SAR missions. *continued...*



Captain Mike Kinsinger of “Jolly 76”

Operating under the call sign “Sandy,” the prop-driven Spad’s ability to fly over downed airman for an extended period complemented its massive firepower. Whereas, jet aircraft often had to leave an area for refueling or rearming, the Sandies provided nearly continuous suppressing fire until helicopters could extract downed airmen. They carried four 20mm cannons and a wide assortment of bombs, rockets, mines, grenades, flares and gun pods. Among this arsenal were two kinds of Cluster Bomb Units (CBUs). One contained white phosphorus smoke, the other carried incapacitating CS gas. Both could be used in the final “pick up” stages of a rescue.

On December 28, Major Robert Bohan, “Sandy One,” was concerned with many things, including the location of Rick and Paul in relation to surrounding terrain and landmarks. He had to begin identifying, locating and eliminating the mind-boggling number of AA guns in the area. Sandy carried sufficient armament to handle some of the enemy himself but his real muscle was directing attack aircraft to destroy the major threats with very decisive munitions.

Sandy needed to keep track of enemy ground forces moving toward the survivors. He had to control all resources, strike aircraft, escort aircraft and the helicopters. The most important decision would be when to order the helicopters in for the actual pickup.

Col. Wood remembers that morning

“I flew a Playboy sortie escorted by 2 F-4’s from VMFA-542 the morning after Playboy 16 was shot down. When we got there, we reported in to Sandy One and he told us that

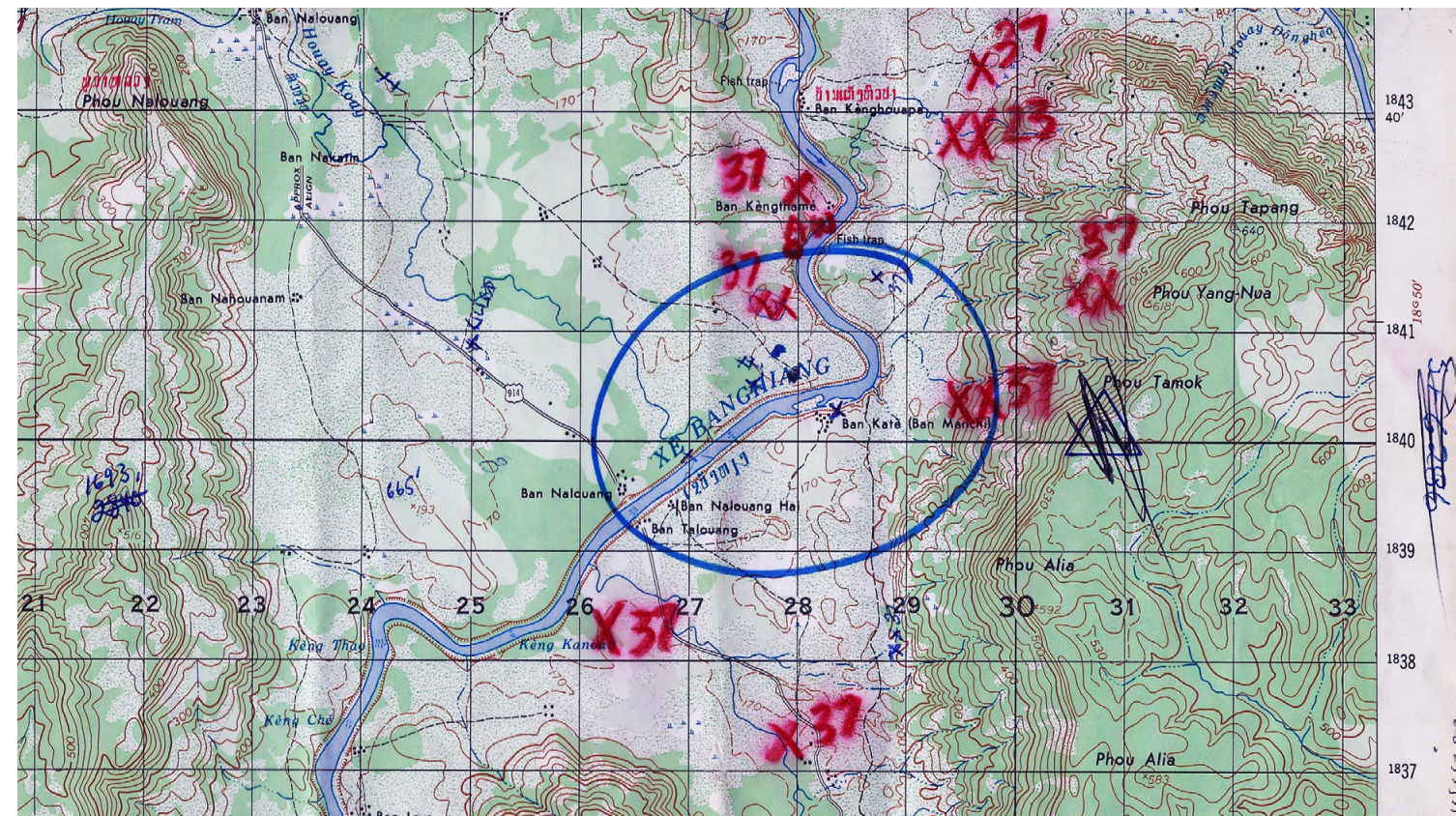
he had 12 strike aircraft overhead and that we could proceed on our scheduled mission. We went up further north in Laos toward D-38, where every grunt gunner in Laos was shooting. They were obviously trying to add more people at the rescue scene to make things more complicated.”

“Here There Be Dragons” Co-pilot Kinsinger describes the morning SAR briefing

“The ‘first light’ rescue attempt never happened as the area had too many AA guns that needed to be silenced. We assembled for a standard briefing about radio frequencies, call signs, etc. They gave us maps that showed the suspected gun positions based on info from the Sandy pilots. I wondered at the time what the hell we were supposed to do with that information. I still remember that I thought they should have just drawn a red circle around the area with the words ‘Here, There Be Dragons’ It would have done us just as much good. If the map was accurate, we all knew we had no chance for a rescue without a lot of bombing of the area. As it turned out the map was a gross underestimate on the guns.

We got our gear and loaded up. I was flying with Captain Gary Sanderson on Jolly 76. His nickname was ‘Sandy,’ by which we all called him. I had to remember to call him Gary so as not to confuse things when it got hectic in the rescue. He was an excellent pilot, which showed in this rescue. (Captain Sanderson has since passed away - author.)

After taking off we flew straight to the orbit area and didn’t land at NKP. I believe that another flight later landed as more back up. We were not the primary on this mission. The primary helicopters were the HH-3’s of the 37th ARRS based at NKP.



Here there be dragons. Enemy gun location map from Mike Kinsinger

A Sandy met us and put us into a holding orbit in a safe area and for the next 5-6 hours we bored holes in the sky in a large oval and were bored in another sense of the word. We did listen to the radios, but really couldn’t quite figure out what was happening. The one thing we did figure out was that a lot of devastation was being rained down on the bad guys. I know that we refueled at least once from the HC-130P that was our tanker and flying command post. Also, Gary and I took turns getting out of our seat to walk around the back. That really helped.”

After Sandy One was able to get Major Lewis together with his injured partner, they both then began identifying the immediate gun threats.

Major Lewis acted as a ground Forward Air Controller, a skill in which many Marine aviators receive training.

Obscuring Weather

Visibility at the rescue site complicated everything. At daylight Nail 45 and Sandy One were flying in and out of the clouds at very low altitudes while both attempted to provoke enemy AAA fire to pinpoint enemy gun positions. It worked because the dawn sky was ablaze with tracers. By the afternoon there was an overcast estimated at 1000 feet above ground level. That, coupled with terrain, restricted access to a corridor along a narrow river valley from the south. “King” directed an Air Force RF-4 to rendezvous with all strike aircraft and lead them into the area following the river. Once the RF-4 had the strike aircraft in the SAR area and confirmed visual contact with the survivor’s location, he would light afterburners blasting straight up through the overcast.

Because of the initial intense AAA fire, the on-scene Sandy needed to orbit in the lower part of the overcast to avoid being tracked by the enemy. He would pop down periodically to mark a gun target with WP smoke then pop back up into the clouds.

The intelligence report indicated that a NVA HQ Battalion of AAA guns was in the 1,000-meter grid square that the survivors unfortunately landed in. The gun map given to Captain Kinsinger indicated the survivors were surrounded by at least three 23mm AA guns and ten 37mm AA guns.

Major Lewis would identify the position of the closest guns which Sandy or Nail would mark with white phosphorus rockets, then call in strike aircraft to attack the position. This teamwork went on for several hours as the most threatening were methodically dispatched by airstrikes.

Baiting the Trap

It was apparent that the North Vietnamese planned to use the downed airmen as “bait” to shoot down additional rescue aircraft. As Nail 37 reported, the NVA moved more men and guns into the area to reinforce the expected battle over the survivors.

At least a dozen or more enemy soldiers moved in near Rick and Paul, whose parachute was plainly visible to the enemy. They could have immediately killed or captured them but instead would wait, using them as bait. This strategy was used regularly on rescue missions. Enemy soldiers dug “spider holes” close to the parachute. They would then hide themselves with their automatic weapons waiting for the ambush.

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VMFA-314 “Black Knight” F-4 Phantom

Colonel Wood

“Sandy, Nail and Rick ran a helluva Air War that day. They were not very far south of Tchepone in the valley. There were three flights of Sandys overhead all day. The first crew came back as the third and were there when they got picked up. The FAC Bulletin the morning after they were shot down said there was a Headquarters Battalion of NVA AAA located in the same 1000m grid square that Rick and Paul were in. The number of guns taken out by air that day was amazing.

During the morning SAR operation ‘Lovebug 206,’ an F-4 from VMFA-122, Chu Lai, was diverted to the area. He was a new pilot on one of his early missions in country. They rolled in and gave the gunners seven seconds of tracking time and were hit on their first pass by a 37mm gun. Sandy One told them to turn to heading 210 and eject. They were on the ground very briefly. Luckily, they had ejected in the center of the Jolly Green Holding area. Jinking does work.”

Nail 45 temporarily left the scene of the Playboy 16 rescue to follow the stricken Phantom, Lovebug 206, to their ejection location. Pounds took command of that scene by providing direction and cover for Captain Leonard Fialko, C/P Joe Nall and their Jolly Green crew. After Fialko’s crew picked up the two Phantom pilots, Nail 45 returned to the rescue scene at Tchepone.

“Damn Gary, that’s us!”

At one point during the morning attempt, Sandy felt it was safe to call in an HH-3 Jolly Green helicopter from the 37th ARRS to attempt the extraction. When the Jolly approached, dug-in soldiers popped up raking the Helicopter with automatic weapon fire. The attempt was aborted but it also

disclosed the extent of the enemy NVA surrounding the survivors.

More work needed to be done to deal with the dug-in enemy. Sandy wanted the bigger, heavier HH-53 “Super Jolly” that carried more protective armor.

Captain Kinsinger

“We heard Sandy One call for the first HH-3 to start the run in for the pickup. But they apparently ran into trouble and had to abort the attempt. As we waited for the second HH-3 to go, we got a very surprising call. Sandy said ‘OK Jolly 76 you can start down and I’ll meet you for the ingress.’ I do remember telling Gary ‘Damn, Gary that’s us!’ and we were on our way. I guess that they wanted us because the BUFF was bigger, faster and more heavily armored than the HH-3”

Phantom Firepower

The Marine Corps’ main airbase was in Chu Lai, Vietnam, about 50 miles south of Da Nang. The joint-use facility had two long concrete runways, covered revetments, hangars, etc. It was the Marines’ primary fighter and attack airbase supporting three squadrons of seventy-plus F-4 Phantoms.

The F-4 Phantom, built by McDonnell-Douglas, was a two-place, twin-engine, all-weather fighter/attack aircraft with a top speed of more than twice the speed of sound. It was arguably one of the most versatile fighters ever put into service. More than 5,000 were built. It served more Western air forces than any other jet.

After its first flight, the F-4 was America’s fastest, highest flying and longest range “Top Gun” fighter.

At 1300 on the 28th, the SAR commander ordered F-4B Phantoms loaded with special non-fragmentating ordnance. “The Black Knights” of VMFA-314 had two Phantoms already loaded with that ordnance waiting in the squadron revetments.

Operations Officer Major Bob Johnson, callsign “Fox”, responded to the SAR request. He was an exceptionally experienced aviator on his second combat tour and would fly as leader of this special mission. He assigned me to fly as his wingman. I was, by now, a section leader having flown more than 100 combat missions. But on this flight I would operate as Fox’s wingman.

Johnson knew from the non-fragmentating ordnance request that his flight would be attacking in close proximity to friendlies. We would be armed with Napalm and 20mm cannon. Friendlies were rarely on the ground in Laos with the exception of downed airmen or small recon teams.

Modern-day aircraft use precision guidance such as laser, GPS and other smart technology to deliver ordnance from 15,000’ and above, eliminating much of the AAA hazard.

During Vietnam, ordnance was delivered primarily by visual means. Phantoms have a gunsight with an adjustable mil ring. It is set for the type of ordnance based on delivery speed; dive angle and release altitude. The pilot could compensate for small errors in speed and angle by releasing early or late and/or adjusting the tracking flightpath. In other words, bombing accuracy was a visual skill acquired by extensive training.

During a 13-month combat tour, Marine aviators generally flew more missions than other services. In the Phantom, the teamwork provided by the backseat RIO was key to accurate bombing. The pilot concentrated on tracking while the RIO called deviation from speed; angle and gave a countdown to release altitude. It made the Phantom an accurate and deadly delivery platform.

Major Johnson’s Phantom would carry Napalm and a Hughes MK-4 20mm gun while my aircraft would carry “wall-to-wall” napalm.

While we launched from Chu Lai and headed to Laos, Major Lewis continued to work with Sandy and Nail calling in airstrikes to targets that posed the greatest threat to the rescue. They could not eliminate all of them, but would neutralize the ones along the dangerous ingress route the rescue helicopters would be using.

The show-stoppers had now become the NVA waiting in the spider holes surrounding the survivors’ vulnerable position. Rick had been able to stake down Paul’s chute to clearly identify their own position, but the NVA were there too, dug in, ready for the ambush.

When we arrived in the holding area, we did not need to wait long to be called in. we joined up with the RF-4 reconnaissance bird who asked Fox how fast he wanted to go in.

Lt Franklin Remembers

“Fox” told the RF-4 driver that we’ll ingress at ‘five hundred plus.’ The Phantom had been recently speed-restricted to 400 knots when carrying Napalm due to the weapons tendency to roll up over the wing with any “negative Gs, but Fox wanted to minimize our exposure to AAA.”

We followed the RF-4 in tight formation because of the weather. I was locked onto lead’s right wing and when we got into the area things happened fast. The RF-4 had us quickly confirm we had the survivor’s parachute in sight. We both acknowledged. He then popped out of sight.

Sandy told us to split up as we would be making individual runs close to the parachute and he needed to evaluate our roll-in line and our hits after each run. We kept our speed up. I remember needing more than 60 degrees of bank to stay in a small circular pattern to keep the chute in sight. Besides the cloudy overcast there was a tremendous amount of smoke and fire from the previous attacks on the guns. Sandy did not need to mark the target for us as it was apparent that the area around the parachute was where we needed to deliver the goods.

I remember not thinking about the ground fire, which we were aware of, but instead missing the target or worse, hitting the survivors. Sandy instructed the survivors to roll up in the parachute as the area was going to get very hot.

On Sandy’s command, we commenced our runs from several directions to cover the areas around the chute. Sandy would drop out of the clouds, watch our roll in and lineup, then at the last second clear us hot. We would alternately turn, roll-in, aim, release, then pull up hard while jinking. I know I pressed the target lower than usual and probably scared my RIO. I don’t remember how many runs we made. I do remember that it was intense!”

After our flight was “Winchester” (all ordnance expended) we lit afterburners climbing out of the area. We first rendezvoused with a tanker and then headed back to Chu Lai. Sandy didn’t give us any immediate BDA (damage assessment) but we later learned that right after our strike the Jolly’s were green-lighted to go in”

Sandy now had to mask the rescue scene from enemy fire. He quickly prepared for the ingress of the Captain Kinsinger’s Super Jolly by dropping special CBUs of WP smoke and/or CS gas near the survivors. Wind direction and speed dictated where to lay it. CS gas, nicknamed “Sawdust” is a potent version of tear gas that incapacitates unprotected people causing tearing in the eyes and vomiting.

Captain Kinsinger

“Sandy guided us over ridges and down valleys at about 30 to 50 feet above the trees. Neither of us knew where we were or where we were going. At that point we depended 100% on Sandy. Finally, he said to turn right and go over the ridge on our right and we would be pointed straight at the survivors.

As we came over the ridge, we saw that the whole area was covered in fire and smoke like a scene out of Hell. It was quite heartening to us. Also, a 23mm or 37mm fired a string of tracers in our general direction. I think that he was shooting at a Sandy and not us.

Somebody promptly dropped a WP bomb on him which pretty much took care of things. There was a wide corridor with smoke and/or gas on each side. We went down the middle on the deck at about 140 Knots. Really fast for us but really slow to most of the fixed wing. At one point we seemed to be getting ground fire on our left and I told Sandy about it. I then heard one of the Sandy’s say he was coming up on our

continued...



Major Rick Lewis in the “Jolly” minutes after his rescue

left side. He went past not much higher than us and laid down CBU’s. I told Sandy that we had the survivors in sight. Gary brought us to a hover on the top of them. FYI, in the hover the pilot could no longer see the survivors and was guided into position by the flight engineer who was manning the hoist. The commands were what direction to move or to hold your hover. What I heard this day was as follows: “Move forward--Hold your hover--Penetrator going down--Hold your hover--Penetrator on the ground--Hold your hover--Survivors on the Penetrator and coming up--Hold your hover--Survivors in the aircraft--Let’s go. As I previously mentioned, Captain Sanderson was an excellent helicopter pilot.

I advised Sandy that we had the survivors on board and to guide us out. I think the actual rescue took around 10 minutes thanks to Major Lewis.”

(Major Lewis lifted Paul onto the penetrator and jumped on top of him, Paul passed out and the penetrator lifted both out together).

“We were guided out the same way but in a much more direct line and were climbing to meet our high bird. On the trip to NKP he gave us the once over and said we looked OK. I also took the photo of Major Lewis. As Sandy was leaving, I thanked him for everything they did and got a couple of (mic) clicks in return.

After landing we were met by a medical crew and ambulance that took Major Lewis and Lt Phillips to the hospital. They left before we finished shutting down, so we never got to meet them. I regret that it took 50 years to put a name with the photo. After a short debriefing and refueling we took off to RTB at Udorn.

We landed and taxied to the ‘Valley’ where we were met by a cheering crowd and the traditional hosing down. You got

that honor on your first rescue and your last flight. Another debriefing and then off to the O’Club. It should be noted that several F-4 squadron’s at Udorn took pretty good care of us. Next day it was back to normal, but you had the memories that have lasted more than 50 years.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the pilots flying the Sandy A-1’s, the Nail FAC’s and definitely to the pilots of the ‘fast movers’ that took out the enemy and made this rescue possible.”

The Rescuers - Leave No Man Behind

The American military resolve that we “Leave No Man Behind” is not based on any tactical necessity to recover the wounded or missing. It is a dangerous task to those undertaking it, exposing themselves to ambush from an enemy who understands our cultural necessity to recover a comrade.

More than half a century later the 58,000 service men and women who gave their lives in Vietnam are now being joined by so many veterans who served there. Thousands of rescues took place during that time. Hundreds of the rescuers lost their lives in doing so. Rescue simply meant the gift of life, of living. It meant freedom!

Men who served in squadrons with call signs such as Nail, Sandy, Jolly, King, Hillsboro, Playboy, Misty (too many to names) were far from ordinary. They signed up to serve their country and went to war far from home. They responded every day, every hour, every time a man needed help regardless of the danger.

The Marines of Playboy 16, Rick and Paul, were just two of thousands who were given the gift of life and years by those extraordinary men.

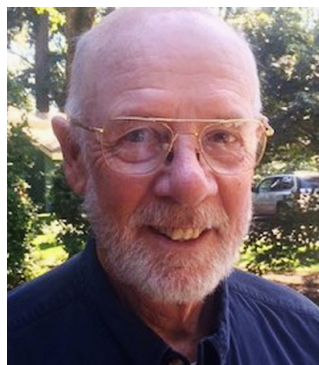
EPILOGUE



Rick Lewis was awarded the Silver Star for his heroism during the rescue. He continued his career in the Marines retiring as a LtCol. Sadly, he died in a sailplane accident in 2008, 39 years after his rescue.



Bob Franklin, later Captain, flew 274 combat missions, leaving active duty in 1972. He spent the next 40 years flying America’s servicemen and women to the world’s “Hot spots” as a Captain for World Airways.



Larry Wood would fly 295 combat missions during his Vietnam tour of duty earning many awards. As a career Marine he rose to the rank of Colonel. He enjoys an active retirement in Oregon.

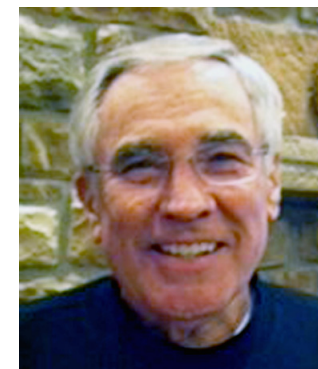


Paul Phillips, later promoted to Captain, recovered from his injuries. He left active duty to fly with Flying Tiger Line which later merged with FEDEX. He passed away in 2020, 51 years from the date of his rescue



Robert “Fox” Johnson would fly 500 combat missions during two tours earning numerous awards including the DFC. Ultimately promoted to Colonel, he would command several Marine Aircraft groups during his 27-year USMC career. He passed away in 2020 at age 84.

Authors note: Over fifty years ago I promised to write this story of ordinary men doing extraordinary things in time of war. Somehow, life got in the way. When I recently learned of the passing of my friend, Paul Phillips, I knew I needed to make good on that old promise. Finding those who were there more than 50 years ago was not easy as many have passed on. This is their story and would not have been written without their help.



Ron Russell earned many awards during his tour of duty, including the Distinguished Flying Cross. He made the Air Force a career, retiring as LtCol. After the military he had a successful career in the defense industry. He spends retirement between Nebraska and Florida.



Mike Kinsinger and Gary Sanderson were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their actions on December 28, 1969. Mike left active duty in 1971 for a successful career in finance. He retired in 2001 and lives in Carrollton, Texas. Captain Sanderson has since passed away.



Herb Pounds, flew 220 combat missions as a Nail FAC, earning three Distinguished Flying Crosses. He left active duty after 5 years to pursue a career in law and banking. He lives in San Antonio where he continues to work at his private law practice.



FROM THE ATTIC

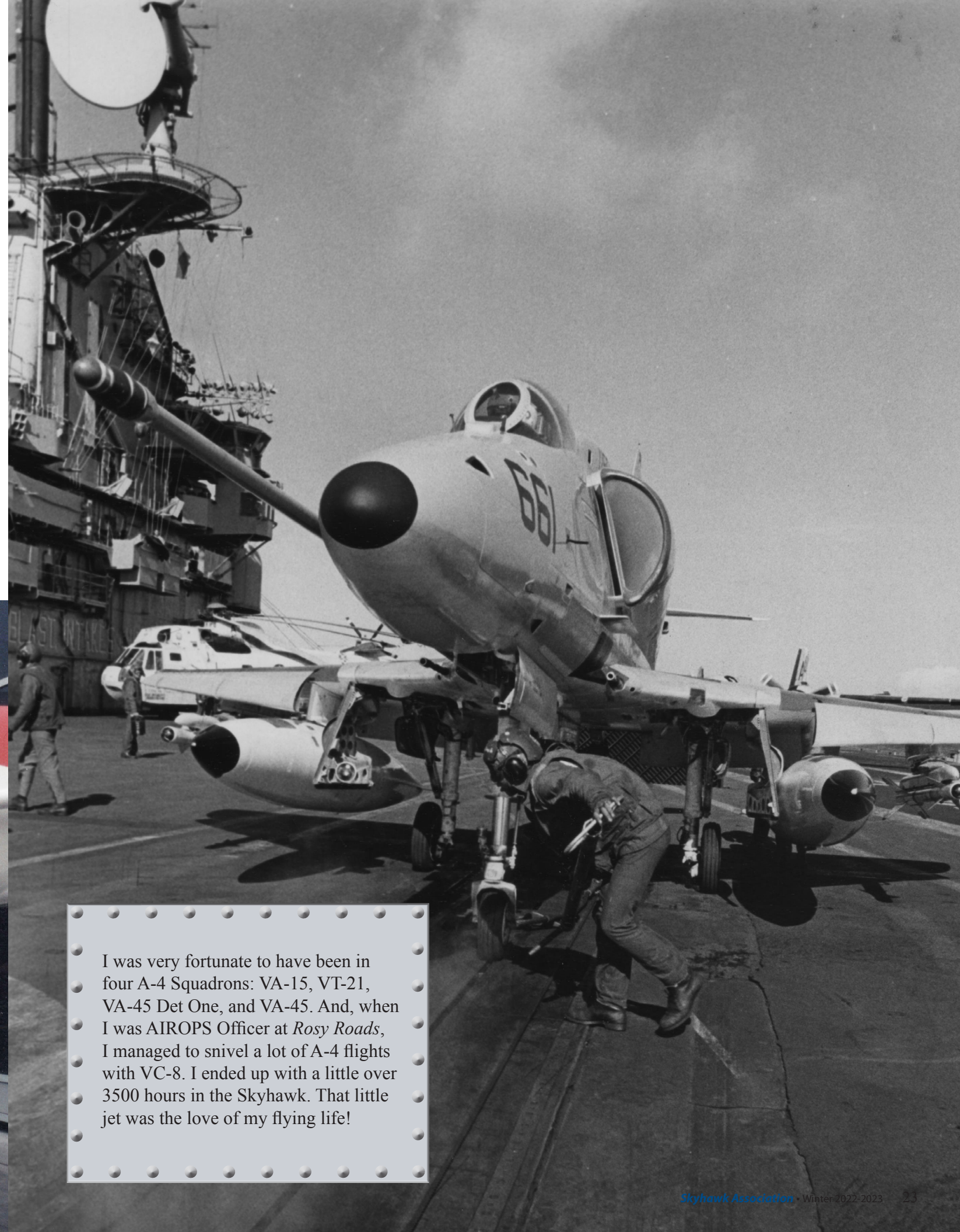
John “Bear” Hildebrandt



I came across this oldie when going thru some picture files. It was taken at the A-4 Retirement ceremony held at The Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola (2003 – Ed). I spent a lot of time flying the A-4 with all these guys. They were all good sticks and loved the old Skyhawk as much as I did!

From left to right are Jay Lillie, John “Bear” Hildebrandt, Bob “Rook” Lewis, John “Pigmy” Paganelli and George “Moose” Lundy. Fortunately, they all are still alive and kicking and I am still able to reminisce with them about the “Good Old Days.”

I was in VA-45 Det One from 1971 until 1973. The Det started up in 1971 and we had six A-4s. We made a North Atlantic cruise on the *Intrepid*. When we got back to the states the Det was augmented to 16 A-4s and we deployed to the Med on *Intrepid*. After we got back from the Med, the Det was decommissioned and I went to VA-45 for shore duty.



I was very fortunate to have been in four A-4 Squadrons: VA-15, VT-21, VA-45 Det One, and VA-45. And, when I was AIROPS Officer at *Rosy Roads*, I managed to snivel a lot of A-4 flights with VC-8. I ended up with a little over 3500 hours in the Skyhawk. That little jet was the love of my flying life!



I'm always happy to have VA-45 Det-One represented in your fine publication. It was a great outfit and we "had a license to steal" on the old *Intrepid*. At the time, it was an ASW carrier with S-2s, SH-3s and a couple "*Stoofs*" with a *Roof*." The Admiral on board really liked to see his "fighter jets" operating and the Air Boss would always approve low, high speed passes up either side of the ship if things were clear. I remember walking through one of the hangar bays one day and seeing an A-4 go by just off the water. I was basically eye-to-eye with the pilot. Plus, we got to intercept and fly wing on wing with a lot of Russian aircraft. I'm sure they were shaking in their boots when we arrived with two Sidewinders on our wings! ...really good times back then!

On our flights, the ship's photo lab gave us good 35 mm SLR cameras to take photos and when we got back, they would take the film, develop it and make prints for us. I always grabbed all of the prints I could and rat holed them away. Most of the shots were taken

on our first cruise when we operated in the North Atlantic up near the Arctic Circle. We were up there in the summer and it would barely get dark at night. I remember a lot of landings at 0100 or 0200 when it was bright as day. We logged them as night traps anyway!





TRIVIA ANYONE

from Dave Dollarhide

The Question: ?

Can a "clean" J-52-P-8 powered A-4E/F exceed Mach one?

Do you know the answer?

To provide your answer, contact Dave Dollarhide
davedollarhide@msn.com

TINS!*

Tales from the LSO Platform

By Lonnie "Eagle" McClung

It's the fall of 1966 and CV-64 with CAG-15, embarked, is on station in the Tonkin Gulf conducting strikes up North both day and night. VA-153 with A-4C's is commanded by CDR MacArthur and VA-155 with A-4E's is commanded by CDR Ingley. During a dark night recovery and after the Phantoms are aboard, the first A-4 presents itself on the ball with a call of "hung flare" and flies a fairly routine pass (if there is such a thing at night). The A-4 touches down and the flare comes off the jet and slides up the landing area over the deck edge into the water. The ship passes over it and the flare ignites in the water. As the ship drives away from the flare, a huge bright light and glow appears in the water directly under the final approach bearing. Appar-



ently, the next A-4 down the chute got focused on the glow in the water and got so high we had to wave him off. The glow lasted several minutes and "Paddles" warned the oncoming jet about it. Thankfully no one else was that badly distracted and the recovery was completed without further incident. The motto of the tale became...

Beware of the Night Deep Sea Monster



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 Dave Dollarhide, davedollarhide@msn.com

Allan Caldwell, 22 August 2022, Seattle, WA
Don "Too Tall" Craig, 27 November 2022, Monument, CO
Pete "Spicket" Davis, 22 September 2022, Newington, NH
Dave "Judge" Kurner, 4 Dec 2022, Carlsbad, CA
F. Mack "Dimmer" Luckie, 10 October 2022, Yuma, AZ,
Ronald Olsen, 22 July 2022, Danbury, CT
Julius Rule, 1 December 2021, Austin, TX
Steve Sewell, 25 May 2022, Sequin, TX
Bill Span, 29 November 2022, Virginia Beach, VA
Charlie "Tuna" Stackhouse, 12 November 2022, Corinth, TX
David Yates, 12 August 2022, Beaufort, SC



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Volume 28 • Number 4



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