

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 29-1



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HOOK '23

Nugget Casino, Sparks, NV

August 24-26

Spring 2023

<https://skyhawk.org>

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net



■ **From: Roy "Shadow" Stafford**
(rwstafford1@att.net)

Subject: Kurt Lawson

Do you guys ever help find former squadron mates? I went through flight training with a fellow Marine named Kurt Lawson. He was an A-4 Driver at El Toro and he and I had been in VMA-102 (A-4 Training squadron at Yuma) together until I switched to the F-4. Lost track of him years ago and would like to reconnect with him if he is a member of the A-4 Association. He was a nice guy and one of my wife's favorites. We've tried to look him up on line unsuccessfully many times. If he's on your list, would appreciate help in finding him.

From: Dave Dollarhide

Kurt Lawson is not on our member list, but we'll post your request in the Letters to Editor section of the Journal.

.....
■ **From: Jonathan Claybaugh**

Subject: US Marines A-4 in Vietnam question

I found your website (and subsequently made a donation!) researching a photo of my Father, Steve Claybaugh (MSgt USAF) of an A-4 (attached). The photo was taken either at a Thai airbase, or potentially in Laos (as per my Dad) I think in 67.

I've been trying to figure out the tail code to map to the Marine airwing the plane belonged to. My hope is to connect with a Veteran's association for the appropriate unit to share the photo with the aviator who flew this plane (or his family). "K.E. Coon" is visible below the canopy and "C F" is on the tail. I've searched the Wall index, and the closest I found is a Marine, Keith Coon, but he was a PFC in a ground unit, so I'm hoping this flyer made it through.

I see the list of units that flew that A-4 and associated contacts on your website, so I'm hoping this might be an easy question for someone who has some domain knowledge on aircraft identification than I have.

From: Dave Dollarhide

Some of what you are saying is confusing. If your father was in the USAF, they never flew A-4 Skyhawks, just the Navy and Marines, so I think that was just a mistake in referring to the Air Force.

Just because a name is on the side of an airplane, doesn't mean that's the airplane that pilot will always fly. Pilots fly airplanes that are "up" and ready for the flight schedule, except for the CO, typically with no regard to the BUNO

or side number. However, it's a good photo. We have several pics of that BUNO on the site, from when it was flying with VMA-211, but not the one you forwarded. With your permission, we'll post it on the VMA-211 page and I'll place your email in the letters to editor section of our Spring 2023 magazine showing your email address.

(The history of 151096 was provided to Johnathan. Ed)

From: Jonathan Claybaugh

Thanks so much for your response and help on this! My goal is really to share the photo, it was one of the best out of the batch of old slides. Please share away.

Re: Air Force, sorry for the confusion. My Dad started his time in SE Asia as USAF ground crew, how he came across this particular plane I'm sure is an interesting story.

From: Todd Frommelt

I'm a Marine Skyhawk guy on the Association's board and also run Marine A-4 reunions. We'll advertise the pic in the next newsletter and see if anyone still around recalls a Thai divert. The pic is of an A-4E, assigned to the VMA-211 Wake Island Avengers who were in VN. They were part of MAG-12 based at Chu Lai, 1st MAW. The Marines, however, didn't have any codes painted on the aircraft for the Marine Air Group or Wing an airplane was assigned. The CF stayed with the squadron. I don't have "in-country" experience, but many of our guys, of course, do. I understand your Dad was based in Thailand for a time? Would you recall which base? I'll let you know if we get any hits and it's possible that airplane diverted to Thailand for fuel or mechanical reasons. While missions were flown in Laos, I'm pretty certain no A-4's landed there. VMA-211 was in and out of country, mostly at Chu Lai, for much of 1966-1973.

continued on page 4...



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



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

◆ ◆
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BOMBS AWAY!

• Spring 2023 •

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————— Published by the Skyhawk Association © 2023 —————

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: Photo by Don Linn - The purpose of the flight was to support a feature story, "Skyhawk Salute," for Air Combat magazine. A-4M, 160024, in the special paint scheme to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the A-4, and for the deactivation of VMA-131, as a key feature for the story. The squadron was based at NASJRB Willow Grove from 1971 until 1998. Flying the A-4M was VMA-131 CO LtCol. George "Eagle" Lake and the F-18 was flown by MAG-49 commander Col. Vic "Clam" Simpson, the backseat passenger is unknown. Maj. Ken "Junior" Waidelich was flying the TA-4J photo bird with me in the backseat. The date was 14 July 1994, the location was off the NJ coast near Atlantic City.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

continued. .

From: Jonathan Claybaugh

To: Todd "Hun" Frommelt

Thanks so much for the email, incredibly interesting. I asked my Dad if he has any idea what base he was at. Like many who came back from SE Asia, he doesn't talk a whole lot about his wartime experiences, but always expressed a lot of admiration for the A-4 and the A-1 and especially Marine rotary pilots for their immense skill. He advised me once to avoid any helicopters unless a Marine was at the controls! :)

I hope the photo connects with someone close to the aircraft. Thanks to all of you for your service.

■ TRIVIA ANSWERS - Can an A-4E/F Exceed Mach One?

(See Trivia Answer for editor comments in this issue.)

From: Tommy Thomason

I'm pretty sure that even a clean Super Fox with a tweaked -408 engine could break the sound barrier in level flight (the F4D with an afterburning J57 couldn't, for example.) the drag rise past the A-4's critical Mach number is just too steep. NATC pilots did take the prototype A-4F (BuNo 152101) supersonic in steep dives during its NPE at Douglas in October 1966, albeit with a small instrumentation store on the center-line station. However, the J65-powered A4D-1 could do that. In September 1956, Bob Rahn took one to Mach 1.19 in a 70-degree dive commenced at 45,000 feet to demonstrate that pulling out was possible with no stabilizer retrimming and using only one hand, a maximum of 120 lbs of aft stick force (he was

allowed to open the speed brakes and put the throttle on the idle stop). He reached the target Mach number at 30,000 feet and commenced the recovery, which was fully accomplished 18,000 feet later.

T <http://tommythomason.com/>

From: Ken "KT" Sanger

A long time ago over, The Tonkin Gulf, [I] Rolled over from around 25,00 feet in a Foxtrot with TERs on. 100% power. Got to .9 something pretty fast, then slowly watched the speed creep to something just over 1.0. Don't remember any details except that it didn't feel special. Did the same thing a few years later, in the same place with an A7.

From: Ray "Wadds" Waddell

I've been supersonic twice in the A-4. Once in a J-52-P-6 TA-4J with two (empty) drop tanks...inadvertently. Lost sight of the fellow I was "safety chasing." Reacquired, push throttle to mil, dumped the nose, cut across the circle. The stick went mostly dead as I went transonic to 1.02M...oops, remember to trim out of the dive. Rendezvous was smartly efficient, but had to down the jet for an inspection of the drop tanks as I had exceeded their Mach limit. Sigh.

But, to answer your question. Yup been supersonic in the A-4E (clean) with the -8 engine. This time on purpose.



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

NEW MEMBERS

Jack Obert, Broadview Hights, OH

Anne Dollarhide, Decatur, GA

David Dollarhide, Jr, Edgewater, FL

Manuel Gurule, Keller, TX

Jerry Terrell, Jacksonville, FL

Brian Walters, Hillsboro, OR

Thomas Hampton, Henderson, NV

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



Still Flying Report

Private Collections

By "The Hun"

Red print = Updated info

It's good to be well established financially. You too can own a Skyhawk! Currently, **5** flyers are in private hands, 3 TA-4J, 1 A-4C and an A-4B. As mentioned below, the Collings TA-4 is back seater certified!

Collings Foundation: Dedicated to preserving "the heritage of the sky," this perhaps most well-known vintage air-



craft foundation operates some 18 flying historical aircraft and maintains for display several more. Its TA-4J, N524CF, (above), is often seen around the most popular air shows around the country. With FAA certification to fly back seaters **Collins can provide back seat rides and pilot-in-command training towards the "Authorized Experimental A-4" endorsement.** You too can fly again -- for about \$7,500. **1 TA-4J**

Warbird Heritage Foundation: Has a similar mission as the Collings Foundation (above). It operates close to a dozen heritage warbirds in air shows and appearances around the country. It's A-4B, N49WH, is actually owned by Mr. Paul Wood and first flew in late



2009. It also shows up in research as a Navy Legacy Flight warbird aircraft **and will be appearing about a half dozen times in shows in '23.** **1 A-4B**

Pacific Aero Ventures, LLC:
Now privately operated and flown by



Jerod Flohr, this beautifully restored TA-4J (by Mike McDougal of Fighting Classics Restoration) is a 2010 addition to the flying Skyhawks. Previously Don Keating's aircraft, N518 is still flying under the Pacific Aero Ventures name in the Northwest and in and out of Las Vegas. It's available again **for sale at about \$4.5 mil.... 1 TA-4J**

Fighting Classics Restorations:
This is Mike "Maj" McDougall's restoration shop, mostly down at Marana Regional Airport, AZ. Maj put together the Pacific Aero Ventures TA-4J for Don Keating (now with Pacific Aero) and pretty much completed restoration of an A-4C



(148597), and reworked the Florida Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum (originally the Spangler/Carr A-4C, NX2262Z/149606) Skyhawk in '17,

A-4's Still Flying!

as of February 2023

15 Military

27 Contract

5 Private

Total: 47



Full report available on Association Website

(See Hun's full 2023 report on Skyhawk.org/The A4/A-4 Skyhawks Still Flying)

both for an Argentine buyer who's no longer in the picture. Both are in Argentine colors, one Camo the other a normal Navy grey. Both are also now bank-owned due to legal issues for the buyer. "Maj" has one still in Marana and the other up in Idaho for the time being. While they had been flyers (so they're both close), with the banks withholding final repair money while they try to sell them, (less than a mil each) let's give Maj credit for just one flyer for now. **1 A-4C (w 1 close)**



Vic "Ditch" Miller: Recently re-discovered TA-4J, 158128, N128TA, has been a good flyer for over two years now! Vic had some legal entanglements back in Texas, but flew his fine steed out to its new home in Visalia, CA, finally free and clear! He's got it in a great camouflaged blue/grey paint scheme, making it quite distinctive **Vic now has this beauty for sale for about \$5 mil. 1 TA-4J**



Read?

you think
we *read*?

Review Two of Three on Books of IAF 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.

REVIEW #2

Loud and Clear: The Memoir of an Israeli Fighter Pilot.

Author: Spector, Brigadier General Iftach.
Zenith Press, Galtier Plaza, ste 200, 380 Jackson St., St. Paul, MN 55101-3885.
2007. Minneapolis, MN 55401. 2009. 426 pp. Ill. \$30.

Iftach Spector has always lived in a whirlwind. A few years ago, he set off a minor firestorm when he signed the declaration of a small group of Israeli pilots who were against his country's actions in Lebanon. If the declaration had come from a bunch of Israeli "hippies" it would not have generated the amount of indignation and righteous wrath from those in military power. But coming as it did from a well-known, heavily experienced combat leader, it stung.

Confrontation is nothing new to Spector, however, and, as he cruised through this latest sea of controversy, he decided to write this memoir. He has also written an emotional, often mystical, yet autobiographical novel about the terrible first days of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, when the Israel Air Force (IAF) and, indeed, the nation, teetered precariously on the edge of extinction. Israeli F-4s and A-4s, their crews, senior and junior, were lost as they threw themselves against Egyptian and Syrian surface-to-air missiles in a desperate attempt to halt the Arab advance across the Sinai and Golan Heights into Israel. Unfortunately, the novel, *A Dream in Blue and Black*, while published in Israel to great acclaim, has yet to have an English edition produced.

Perhaps begun in part as an answer to the reaction to the letter, *Loud and Clear* is a long, but colorful, interesting read, written as only Spector could. It's full of personal references that set up the main topic, namely how Israel's fabled air force had to fight its many conflicts, the ones with its Arab neighbors, and those within its tight-knit organization. He begins by describing his own family's early history, the loss of his father, when Spector was barely a year old, on a commando raid against Syria in 1941, and the role his strong, intense mother played in his growing up. She was a leader in the Palmach, an early group of fighters that fought alongside the British during World War II and then helped establish Israel as a state in 1948.

LOUD AND CLEAR

THE MEMOIR OF AN ISRAELI FIGHTER PILOT



BRIGADIER GENERAL
IFTACH SPECTOR

Spector's words are not those of the typical fighter-pilot-turned-writer, struggling to describe his experiences. The words flow lyrically with the ease and intensity of a practiced writer of fiction or of an experienced essayist. Actually, *Loud and Clear* is not for someone looking mainly for an aerial shoot-'em-up, although there is enough dogfight action as the author leads us through his deeply personal narrative. Spector shows us his mistakes and successes in the air and on the ground, as a junior pilot and as a senior combat leader

trying to keep his squadron together and alive for one more strike.

The general is a deep thinker, a modern version of the French aviation-writer icon Antoine de St. Exupery, but with a much more active, modern style that won't put you to sleep as will "St. Ex's" boring and dated prose. Spector's introduction and subsequent description of one of his first squadron commanders, arguably one of the most colorful and dynamic individuals the IAF ever had, is an artful chapter of personal recollection and admiration. Even after Spector and the older pilot have a terrible confrontation over rumors about wartime atrocities, Spector's tone is one of sorrowful respect and regret. The senior aviator, an early IAF ace, and respected pilot, remains a seminal character to this day. Spector has simply put him in a beautifully crafted frame. His later introspective review of his own tour as a squadron commander is a wonderfully personal look at how he thought he did in this most difficult time in a military career. It would benefit any current CO to read it.

Describing Operation Moked (Focus), the initial IAF attack of the 1967 Six Day War that devastated most of the Arab aerial opposition on the ground, the author also pulls things together in a nugget-filled essay that puts the war in perspective better than most other such descriptions I have seen. Likewise, his assessment of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the criticism leveled at the higher echelons of the Israel Defense Force are enlightening. His description of the early development of Israeli reconnaissance drones--what we now call unmanned aerial vehicles, which have served American forces so well in Iraq and Afghanistan--and his end-of-book discussion of the June 1981 attack on the Iraqi nuclear installation, on which he flew, are also unusual, unexpected summations of important events within the IAF.

Having finished the book, I was struck by how much of himself the author had put in the narrative, while remaining clearly above the fray. He had participated in much of the actions he wrote about, but he always remained something of an ethereal creature



Iftach by F-16.

hovering above the clouds, outside the main arena. Perhaps that is what angered so many people in 2003 when he signed the pilot's declaration against activity in the "Territories," namely Gaza and Lebanon. This detachment comes from someone who has the credentials to comment stridently on these actions. The reader will see what I am talking about when he reads this highly personal memoir.

There have been several recent memoirs by Israeli pilots, and perhaps one or two more on the way. All by men who are well known in their home country, but unfamiliar in Europe and the U.S. All have been originally published in Hebrew and then translated for their English edition. Thus, there are occasional odd phrasings but the meaning of the author's words is always unmistakable. What was once a *terra incognita*--the deeply intimate experiences of the secretive *chel ha'avir*'s aviators--has been thrust into the glaring light of public knowledge and inspection. This latest effort is arguably the best of the lot...so far. More to come? ✈



Iftach Spector in a Mirage.

The Grumman F8F Bearcat

By LCDR (Ret) Bill Wenzel



F8F Bearcat

I didn't like being faced with the approaching draft. My sister was a WASP and my brother was flying P-47 Thunderbolts in the Pacific theater. So, when the Navy suddenly announced they would accept 17-year-olds into a program known as V5 for Aviation Cadets, I immediately enlisted and was awarded aviator training. Meanwhile, I was processed into the Navy and waited at my home in Norwalk, CT for a Preflight Training slot.

We were winning WWII and the flight training got terribly stretched out. The war came to an end before I ever got to the primary aviation field. Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war and most everyone was suddenly being discharged. We were given a choice of remaining in the Navy, which I requested and was given a year off at nearby Trinity College. At the same time, I was assigned as a reservist, "drilling" at NAS Floyd Bennett, NY. Another three months of washing hangar floors and watching Navy "fleet squadron" pilots being assigned airplanes as they arrived from the Grumman factory at Bethpage, NY. I was told they were F6F Hellcats and the pilots were flying them to their respective air bases.

During that time, I remember a small twin engine fighter was

repeatedly circling the field at a very high rate of speed. I was told it was an F5F Grumman experimental plane that could climb to ten thousand feet in one minute. Unbelievable at the time, winter of '44.

After *Preflight* at Chapel Hill, NC, *Primary* in Norman, OK, *Basic* in Corpus Christi and *Advanced* at NAS Banana River, FL, I finally got my wings after carrier qualification (CARQUAL) at NAS Pensacola in June of 1946.

I was assigned to Fighter Squadron Twelve, located at NAS San Diego. My airliner landed at *Lindbergh Field* and a Navy driver was waiting for me. He took the short ferryboat ride across the

harbor where several aircraft carriers were docked. After a very long ride around the big field the road came to an end and a ranch style duplex showed a tiny VF-11 sign on one end and VF-12 on the other.

I opened the door to VF-12. The room was empty! I dropped my bags against the wall. Once acquainted with the room I took the door to the hangar. A couple of young pilots heard me and introduced themselves as Donald and Ronald Bebaets, identical twins. Don was a little taller than Ron, yet I often mixed them up. They were expecting me and this was our temporary home, while based aboard USS Tarawa, CV-40 on the pier close by.



XF5F



Bill in his Bearcat.

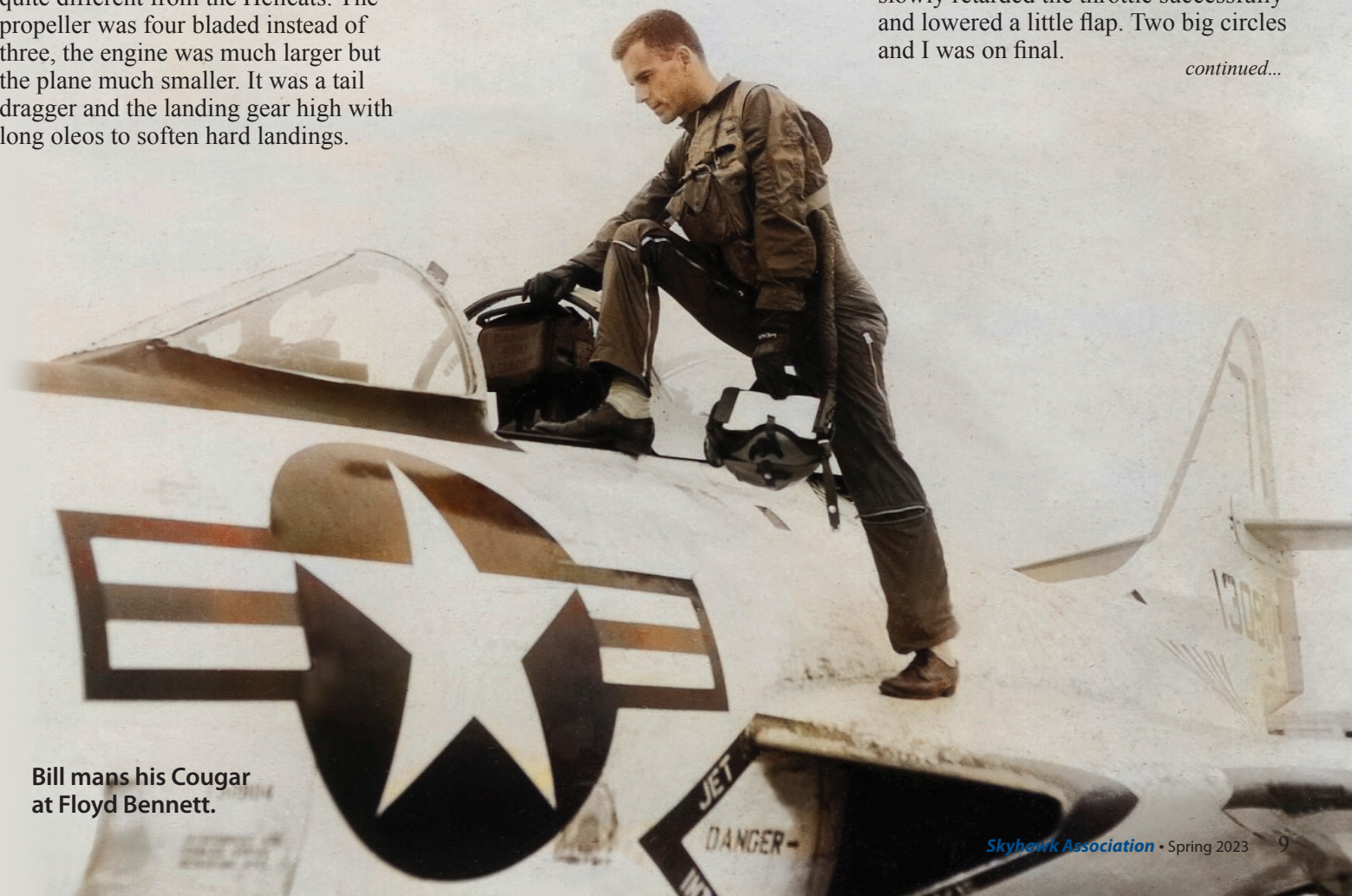
They took me out to the long flight line and showed me their F6F planes with their names on them. I asked them, "Where is everybody?" Before answering they wisely said they wanted to show me something. They walked me down to the last plane on the flight line. As I approached, I could see it was quite different from the Hellcats. The propeller was four bladed instead of three, the engine was much larger but the plane much smaller. It was a tail dragger and the landing gear high with long oleos to soften hard landings.

The twins said the pilots were sent to Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York to pick up their planes from the factory. The F6s were being replaced by the F8Fs and they said I could take out an F6F anytime if I wanted to.

Following more CARQUALs, we deployed to the Western Pacific in a peacetime role. My most memorable moment in the Bearcat begins as follows: So there I was at 8,000 feet, a hundred miles off the Chinese coast near Tsingtao, when I heard a very loud explosion and a cloud of black smoke engulfs me. I called quickly "May-Day, Engine Failure!" Almost instantly there was a plane on my left wing. It was CAG. He said "Keep your airspeed" several times as I eased my plane into a glide. I moved the throttle and hit the starter. The engine started right up, ran smoothly until I advanced the throttle. WHAM! Black smoke, dead engine. I got the engine running again but at a very high rpm. Pulling back on the rpm, WHAM!

I got the engine going again at a high RPM and power. It was purring. I told CAG that I was not going to touch anything and that it would be risky landing on the carrier. I would have to cut the engine and glide to a landing. He said there was a Marine base near our location. He gave me a vector to it. A half hour later I was circling the secret cinder runways at eight thousand feet. I slowly retarded the throttle successfully and lowered a little flap. Two big circles and I was on final.

continued...



Bill mans his Cougar at Floyd Bennett.

The Grumman F8F Bearcat

continued...

The cinders were loose and very bumpy. I cut the engine and they towed me in. The Marines figured it out right away. They looked at the carburetor and found that it was double barreled. A door was hinged to cover the openings of the two barrels. The hinge of the door had broken and the door was flopping around, moving whenever the throttle asked for more air.

Another F8F was there, a result of a hydraulic failure. Our planes were ready by morning and we planned to give the Marines a show, with the other pilot leading. They had never seen an F8 Bearcat. We taxied to the far end of the short runway. My flight leader went first, holding his brakes as he added power until tail rose off the ground. He released brakes, jammed throttle to max. The bumpy surface put him in the air in less than a football field. He retracted his wheels and held the plane at twenty feet or less until he reached the end of the runway. He yanked the plane sharply to vertical climb and held it to a thousand feet. The Marines were shouting wildly as the pilot fed in some left rudder cartwheeling to level flight.

Then it was my turn. I released brakes, jammed to full power, hearing the cylinders flying as I rolled. I hadn't gone a hundred feet when a bump put me in the air. I remembered taking off behind the Blue Angels once. They were flying F8Fs and the wingmen broke free of the ground so quickly they seemed to be flying on the prop. So, I eased back on the stick as necessary to keep the plane from sinking back to the ground and made it. Wheels up and I settled into a 90KT climb. I remembered that was listed by the test pilots as the maximum rate of climb. At a thousand feet I turned left and saw that I hadn't even reached the end of that short runway.

Since we were at the far end of the runway and taking off toward the hangars it must have looked to them like I had no roll at all and just leaped into the air. Their shouts and yells over the radio were so dramatic that we enjoyed our flight back to our home aboard *Tarawa*.



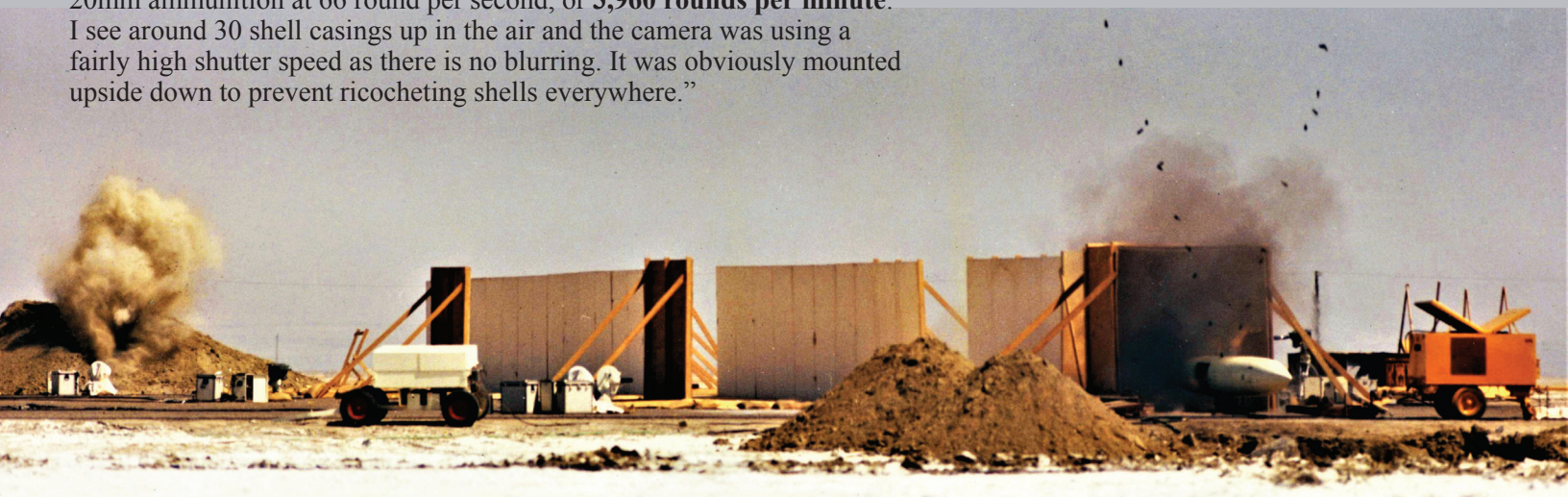
Bill Wenzel

LCDR Bill Wenzel served in VF-12 from 1943 to 1949, flying F8F Bearcat aircraft from the USS *Tarawa* CV-40. After six years on active duty, he joined a Navy Reserves Squadron at NAS Floyd Bennett in New York. At the end of Bill's eighteen years in the Reserve Squadron, he completed ground school for the A-4B aircraft. However, the Navy closed the base before the squadron flew the aircraft.

Bill and his wife, Ave, currently reside at Smith Mountain Lake, Virginia, and are founding members of Trinity Ecumenical Parish. In March they celebrated their 70th Wedding Anniversary. Editor

FROM THE FILES OF GARY VERVER

Gary provides his thoughts about this cool photo from China Lake. "My educated 'swag' is this is a test firing of a HIPEG (High Performance External Gun), that later became known as the Mark 4 Gun Pod. It fired 20mm ammunition at 66 round per second, or **3,960 rounds per minute**. I see around 30 shell casings up in the air and the camera was using a fairly high shutter speed as there is no blurring. It was obviously mounted upside down to prevent ricocheting shells everywhere."



Captain Royce Williams Upgraded to Navy Cross Medal

This report by Attendee Todd "Hun" Frommelt



Captain Royce Williams was honored on 20 January, 2023, with the award of a Navy Cross medal by Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro at a ceremony in front of San Diego's Air and Space Museum. This was an upgrade to his previously earned Silver Star, received rather quietly back during the Korean War. On November 18, 1952, then Lt Royce launched as part of a flight of four F9F-5 Panthers for a CAP mission along the Yalu River. After the rest of his flight returned to the Oriskany for various aircraft problems, Royce engaged what turned out to be an estimated seven MIG-15s, reportedly flown by Soviet pilots, who fired the first shot. In one of the longest

dogfights in history, Royce not only survived, but shot down at least four of the higher performing MIGs. The politics of the time led the US Navy and government to keep the gunfight and his exploits highly classified for several decades and once it became public, Royce supporters began a long campaign to upgrade his award. This ceremony was the culmination of that campaign.

In addition to the Secretary of the Navy and Royce, distinguished at-

tendees included on the dais were also ADM Sam Paparo, Commander Pacific Fleet, Congressman Darrell Issa, and VADM Kenneth Whitesell, Commander US Naval Air Forces. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan was also present in the crowd of some 400.



Want to speak with the legend? Royce is a regular attendee at the Skyhawk Association, Attack Ready Room at Tailhook Reunions in Reno. This 2014 photo shows Royce with TR Swartz, Vietnam A-4 pilot and MIG-17 killer.



Last of the Marine Corps' Red-Hot Scooters

By Don Linn

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Sunday, August 7, 1994, was a warm, pleasant summer day at NAS Willow Grove as a crowd of Marines and guests gathered on the VMA-131 flightline to witness the close of a chapter in Marine Corps' aviation history. Suddenly, after much anticipation, to their left, a four-ship formation of A-4M Skyhawks appeared over runway 33 in a low pass. In the lead was a special Skyhawk painted in an anniversary scheme to commemorate the Skyhawks 40th anniversary. LtCol George "Eagle" Lake, CO, was leading the flight, bringing his A-4Ms home for the last time. The Skyhawks continued down the full length of the runway in a final salute to the Diamondbacks' thirty-two years of flying Skyhawks and the end of service for the Marine Corps' legendary Skyhawks. VMA-131 was deactivated shortly after and the squadron's remaining Skyhawks were bound for the boneyard.

As Lake continued his flight to the landing pattern, the 4th MAW Band began to play. The Skyhawks "broke"

and entered the downwind in preparation for landing. Lake was last to touch down. Waiting at the entrance to the squadron ramp were two of the air station's fire trucks, parked facing each other but leaving sufficient distance for the A-4s to pass between as they taxied in. As Lake passed between them, the fire trucks opened their water cannons, fixed on the top of their trucks, to form an arch of water that rained down on his aircraft. Thus, began the customary 'wetting-down' ceremony reserved for pilots making their last flight.

Simultaneously, a lone firefighter opened his water hose, also wetting down the remaining squadron pilots in formation, while the Marine Corps Band continued to play. Then, it was over. The Marines' last A-4 squadron had officially retired and the Skyhawk's 40 years of service with the Marine Corps ended.

Among the many officials, pilots and ground crews taking part in the ceremony was guest of honor, Douglas test pilot, Bob Rahn. He flew the

prototype XA4D-1 on its first flight on 22 June, 1952 and directly worked with Skyhawk designer Ed Heinemann to refine the Skyhawk's design. It was fitting that the man who was there at the beginning was also witness to the final flight of the last Marine Corps' Skyhawk. When asked about the Skyhawk's beginning, he recalled, *"I distinctly remember the first time I saw the mock-up of the A-4. I didn't think I was going to fit in that cockpit. I was six-one and weighted about 200 pounds then, and the first thing I did was climb in the cockpit to see if I fit."*

The A-4's cockpit is small and for pilots Rahn's size it was always a snug fit. Upon entering the cockpit for the first time he remarked his shoulders were right up against the side rails. The same was still true when Rahn climbed into the anniversary Skyhawk, side number 00 (Double Nuts), during his visit with VMA-131 that day. The XA4D-1's first flight lasted about 40 minutes and according to Rahn, *"It was basically uneventful. All we did was*



Current and past squadron members pose for a group photo for the last time in front of the Anniversary Skyhawk on 7 August 1994. Douglas test pilot Bob Rahn is standing in the center wearing a white shirt and tie with glasses. The Tailhook plaque reads, *Anytime Anywhere, VMA-131*.

take it up to 10,000 feet. A lot of guys wouldn't raise the landing gear on the first flight, but I did. I had enough confidence in the aircraft." Continuing, he added, "First, I climbed to 10,000 and checked out the stability with the gear down and flaps down. I did this in case I had an emergency where I had to land right away. I would at least know about stability, control and landing qualities and approach speeds. Everything seemed OK, so I raised the gear and increased airspeed to 250."

So marked the beginning of the Skyhawk's long service life. Rahn's career spanned well over four decades. He continued working with Heinemann on the flight-test program until 1956 when Douglas assigned him to the F5D Skylancer project. "I would occasionally fly the Skyhawk, but I was no longer the primary pilot," he added. Sadly, Bob Rahn died just a short three years after this ceremony on 18 May, 1997 at age 77. He will be forever linked in aviation history to this legendary airplane.

continued...



Douglas test pilot, Bob Rahn.

“Gone but Not Forgotten”

Throughout its service, the A-4 Skyhawk was an important asset in Marine Corps aviation. It served well in both war and peacetime. Following the stand-down ceremony on 7 August, 1994, all but two of the squadron's remaining A-4Ms were eventually retired to the infamous “Boneyard” at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, or selected for sale to foreign air arms. The Diamondbacks’ “Double Nuts” and “Zero One” (side number 01) were saved from the desert sun and are now permanent reminders of the Skyhawk’s Marine Corps service. “01” is displayed at the Harold F. Pitcairn Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum located at Biddle Air National Guard Station, the former NAS Willow Grove, and “Double Nuts” is displayed in a park near New Bern, apparently lacking in care.

The beginning of the end of the Skyhawk saga came in 1989 when the “Wake Avengers” of Marine Attack

Squadron 211 transferred their A-4Ms to the reserves of the 4th MAW and began their transition to the new AV-8B (NA), Night-Attack, Harriers. The “Avengers” represented the last active-duty Marine unit to fly the A-4, and when they gave up the Skyhawks, just four Marine Reserve squadrons were left as USMC operators. When Marine Reserve Squadron, VMA-322, based at NAS South Weymouth, Massachusetts, disestablished on 27 June 1992, it left VMA-131 as the sole Marine Corps Skyhawk squadron.

It seemed fitting, too, that VMA-131 had the honor of flying Marine Corps A-4s into retirement. The squadron flew several different Skyhawk variants since being based at NAS Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, New York, in 1968. The unit's first Skyhawk during that time was the A-4B. Ten years later it transferred to NAS Willow Grove to form the nucleus of Marine

Air Group-49 (MAG-49) and subsequently transitioned to A-4Es. At that time, VMA-131 adopted the striking paint scheme superbly duplicated on the Marines’ last Skyhawk flown by Lt. Col. Lake during the 1994 stand-down ceremony. The Diamondbacks later traded their A-4Es for the A-4Ms which they flew to retirement.

When it was clear the squadron would phase out the A-4, unit personnel assumed they would receive new aircraft, perhaps the F/A-18 Hornet, or even the AV-8B Harrier. There was even suggestion they might receive helicopters. Unfortunately, new aircraft did not materialize. Reduced military budgets and force structure downsizing meant disestablishment of the unit. Nonetheless, VMA-131 was determined to secure a place in aviation history, both for itself and the A-4 Skyhawk, by giving the venerable aircraft a proper retirement. It was a great sendoff.

Capt Jon Bertagna in Diamondbacks’ A-4E 150001 in their colorful pre-1980s paint scheme, flying on LtCol Brooks Dyer, CO, in A-4E, 150121, with inert MK 82 Snakeyes, enroute to the Navy’s Bloodsworth Island Range, on a 1981 training flight, with Maj Jack Rice, flying the photo TA-4F, with Don Linn.



“Double Nuts”

Ed Miranda, retired Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt), who spent his 20-year career with the Marines maintaining A-4s, was instrumental in securing permission to apply a special paint scheme to commemorate both the Skyhawk's 40th anniversary and its retirement. The two events came close to falling on the same day. Assisted by squadron volunteers and with approval of squadron commander LtCol Lake, he and his small group of volunteers repainted A-4M, 160024, in the special scheme illustrated in this article.

The task was accomplished over a period of months because the A-4 was still operational at the time. The standard grey low viz camouflage was replaced with new markings to represent the squadron's colorful markings from the early 1980s. Striking in appearance, the scheme comprises an overall gloss gull grey and white scheme, standard for the period, with a black-and-yellow

“Diamondbacks” chevron across the fuselage, and black and yellow rudder stripes. Local artist Gary Campbell volunteered his time and artistic talent to complete the work by applying a hand-painted squadron crest on the left side in the center of the chevron and a special anniversary crest on the right side. Naturally, the “Double Nuts” side number was applied to the nose that identified it as the commander's aircraft and proudly flown by LtCol Lake on training hops. He and others were careful to maintain the flawless paint scheme during operational sorties wearing shoe covers to protect the finish.

Miranda, Campbell and the squadron volunteers did a superb job in recreating the 1980s anniversary scheme. Making the task more difficult, it was accomplished between regularly scheduled training sorties. They also succeeded in the daunting task of keeping the Skyhawk in pristine appearance during

the unit's annual two-week training deployment to MCAS Yuma where the Skyhawk flew concentrated weapons training sorties. Taking extra precautions, the crew chief and maintainers even wore covers on their boots when servicing the aircraft. There was evident pride in their charge.

However, the surprising end of the story of A-4M, 160024, was the difficulty in getting the Marine Corps Museum at MCAS Cherry Point to accept the Skyhawk for permanent display. Reportedly, no money was available to put “Double Nuts” on display and maintain it. Temporarily, it was accepted at Cherry Point for display outdoors, but funding ran out after several months and it was moved to a hangar awaiting its final disposition. Since that time, the Skyhawk has moved, as previously noted and is now at a park in New Bern, NC lacking the care it deserves.

continued...



“Zero One”



In the second part of this story another VMA-131 A-4M, 158182, was restored by the same team of Ed Miranda, Gary Campbell and joined by John Benton, a retired naval aviation electronics technician and at the time curator of the Willow Grove Aviation Museum, famous for its display of captured WW2 aircraft. In recent years the Air and Space Museum and the Naval Aviation Museum at Pensacola have claimed many of the exhibits, although some of the display aircraft have been replaced with other donated historic aircraft. The group initially sought permission to obtain an A-4M that was badly damaged by a bird strike during a 1984 training flight. The pilot, Major Jim “Crash” Wright skillfully brought the Skyhawk home to Willow Grove with half its tail missing. The aircraft was written off and donated to the base fire department for practice firefighting

drills. Before it was destroyed by the fire department, Benton asked permission to restore the Skyhawk for the museum’s collection. Working closely with Miranda and Campbell, this second “Mike” was cosmetically restored and repainted in the same scheme as “Double Nuts” with a few differences.

Gary Campbell recreated a caricature of famed WW2 Marine pilot Butch O’Hare using a photograph of O’Hare as his model. The likeness is accurate and very well done. On the right fuselage he has painted a Grumman TBF Avenger as a tribute to the squadron’s WW2 service when the unit was VMSB-131 on Guadalcanal, with the image of O’Hare superimposed over it. Of course, O’Hare was a Grumman Wildcat pilot, but was still a suitable choice. On the left side is the squadron’s distinctive squadron crest. Both details applied to a black and yellow

Diamondback fuselage chevron, like “Double Nuts.” Today, this A-4M and other beautifully restored aircraft are on static display in Willow Grove at the Harold F. Pitcairn Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum.

Postscript

VMA-131 continued without aircraft until 5 December 1998 when the squadron was officially disestablished. On that unseasonably warm fall day, at 15:30 hours, the squadron colors were cased (retired), and members stood their last roll call and offered their final salute. However, “Double Nuts” and “Zero One” remain as poignant reminders of the proud history of Marine Attack Squadron 131.

Except for the Douglas Aircraft Bob Rahn photo, all pictures are from the author. Editor

TINS!*

By Walt Fink

Not too long after we changed to that new oil, we came pretty close to losing an airplane, but didn't, thanks to the stars being aligned or something. My buddy Bob was airborne on a radar tracking exercise for a ship when suddenly the plane seemed to be trying to shake itself to pieces. He made an immediate turn toward base and declared an emergency. He said in the descent the vibrations started going harmonic, increasing and decreasing in intensity, but the mill was still running so he kept on truck'n.

Bob got the airplane back on terra firma safely and with nothing seemingly in flames or disabling it, he taxied into the line. The rundown time was normal but Bob said it sounded like a streetcar with a flat wheel. The mechs went all over the engine and accessory drives, and nothing seemed to be amiss, all very normal. A couple of runups didn't indicate anything was out of whack either, so Maintenance put the airplane up for a test hop the next morning.

It just so happened that Bob was the SDO that day and kept insisting that something was wrong with the plane, adamant that it wasn't going to be him who'd fly it and whoever did was asking for trouble. He and the Chief came up with a plan. They towed the bird out into the Alameda chocks and Bob climbed in. He tried to simulate the flight as best he remembered -- idle for ten minutes, takeoff thrust for X minutes, cruise setting for Y minutes, etc. and about fifteen minutes into this test, he said he felt the airplane "shiver." He raised his hand and signaled the Plane Captain, who felt the engine casing through the access panel to see if he could feel the vibration too.

It may not be the truth, but it's how I remember it.

ALL SEIZED UP

“ My buddy Bob was airborne on a radar tracking exercise for a ship when suddenly the plane seemed to be trying to shake itself to pieces. ”



I think it was about that time that the Chief started seeing really black oil coming out of the overboard vent and decided to end the test. He had Bob shut down the engine and this time around, there wasn't any rundown time. Seized up! I think Bob told me they took the bearing temperatures and the rear main bearing was off the scale somewhere.

NOW HEAR THIS! NO JUMPING OUT OF AIRPLANES TODAY

Case of the Skyhawk with Two Rudders



By Doug Bohs, AQF2, VF-21 1961 - 1965

As part of Operation Rolling Thunder, the USS Midway arrived on Yankee Station on April 9, 1965. On May 11, I heard an announcement over the IMC to ready the flight deck for an emergency landing. After a few more announcements signaling the successful recovery of an aircraft I went up to the flight deck to investigate. What I saw compelled me to go below and get my camera. Back on the flight deck I took this close up color photo. For almost 55 years the slide was in my possession without any knowledge of what had happened to the aircraft.

In January of 2020 I digitized all of the slides I had taken while on active duty. Most of them brought back many memories, but what you see in this photo only brought questions. Several attempts to find any reference to any event like this happening on the '65 cruise went nowhere.

Within a few days I contacted Dave Batson, a VF-21 squadronmate and F-4 pilot. I sent him the picture and asked if he knew any details of the incident. Dave knew the name of the pilot but was not clear as to what happened to his aircraft. In a rare moment of clarity, I sent an email to The Tailhook Association with my photo and the name of the pilot. Batson was a member and they were kind enough to contact the pilot and soon we began corresponding to complete the story. The Tailhook Association had been keeping this black and white photo of the same incident on file without any information on the surrounding circumstances. This picture was probably taken from Pri-Fly. The "other rudder" is visible directly below the intake.

Then LT Raymond "Paul" Ilg was flying an A-4C Skyhawk bound for NAS Cubi Point, Philippines. Air Wing Two, aboard USS Midway, was at the end of its first Yankee Station line period. The date was Tuesday, May 11, 1965.

The complete story follows in his words:

"VA-22 (Fighting Redcocks) had 12 aircraft airborne and joining over the carrier. I was number 11, joined, waiting for number 12 before the flight headed for Cubi Point. Number 12 joined "hot" and ran into the underside of my aircraft sticking his vertical fin into my main fuel tank. The pilot in number 12 was forced to eject and was subsequently picked up by a plane guard helo.

My fuel state was near maximum when I joined the formation but I could see the fuel gauge dropping rapidly and I was streaming a great deal of fuel. Two of the 12 A4-Cs were tanker configured. Bill Newman⁽¹⁾ was flying one of the tankers and we joined as soon as possible. My fuel gauge indicated 200 p (pounds) of fuel as I plugged into the tanker and did not increase as I was accepting fuel.

At 2.5 miles out from Midway Newman dropped me off on the ball and I was all elbows getting gear and flaps down and maintaining the ball as I slowed to approach speed.



Rudder jammed into main fuel tank after landing.

The aircraft burst into flames on arrestment due to the streaming fuel, the engine flamed out and the fire stopped. Obviously, I was relegated to riding the ship into port."

Recapping the Fuel Issue

Vice Admiral Ilg stated his fuel level was at 200 pounds and never went above that as he was accepting fuel. His fuel level never changed as he flew back to the Midway. Obviously, he was burning and losing fuel as fast as he was receiving it. He also stated his engine flamed out, just as he landed and the flames stopped.

The significance of his fuel level cannot be overstated. His aircraft was completely out of fuel the instant he landed. Separation at the estimated 2.5 miles was just enough to get him back aboard with nothing but fumes left. Separation any further from Midway could have been disastrous, especially if he would have run out

of fuel close to the ship without time to safely eject. Closer separation might not have given him time to get the feel of the plane with the extra drag from the rudder embedded in the fuel cell of his plane.

Additionally, having excess fuel at landing would have increased the potential for a disastrous explosion. Clint Johnson of VA-25 was aft of the island in his A-1 Skyraider, when the emergency was declared. His aircraft was towed forward of the island and he watched the landing. He said he could see the sparks from the “other rudder” scraping the flight deck just as LT Ilg’s aircraft touched down. Everything worked. For most reading this article, going over the possible consequences of his fuel state is stating the obvious, but in fact, it was an incredible act of “on the fly” decision-making by many that produced a perfect outcome.

For his actions that led to saving himself and his plane, LT Raymond Ilg was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Weeks later on June 3, Ilg was shot down over Laos and rescued 47 hours later.



A-4 w embedded rudder lands trailing fuel edit.

His story appeared in the Winter 2020 edition of *The Hook Magazine*. He went on to have a very distinguished career, retiring as a Vice Admiral in 1991.

Bill Newman retired as a Rear Admiral in 1996. His duty assignments included Commanding Officer and Flight Leader of the Blue Angels.



(Painting by Lou Drendel from his book, *A-4 SKYHAWK Illustrated*, rudder addition by author)

TRIVIA ANYONE?

from Dave Dollarhide

(Written in past tense to reflect the US Navy and Marine use of the Skyhawk.)

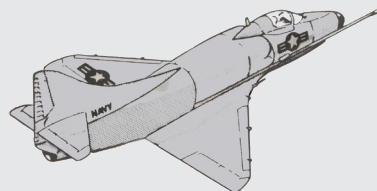
The Question: Could a “clean” J-52-P-8 powered A-4E/F exceed Mach one?

Discussion and Answer:

The answer is YES, a clean A-4E/F could exceed Mach 1, and once at 1.2, would be in supersonic flight.

According to NATOPS, the maximum permissible indicated airspeed/Mach number for a clean J-52-P-8 powered A-4E/F, with landing gear, flaps and hook retracted, was **630 KIAS** and **Mach 1.2** as read on the chart below. The maximum IAS was available at sea level and the allowed Mach of 1.2 between 20,100' and 30,100'.

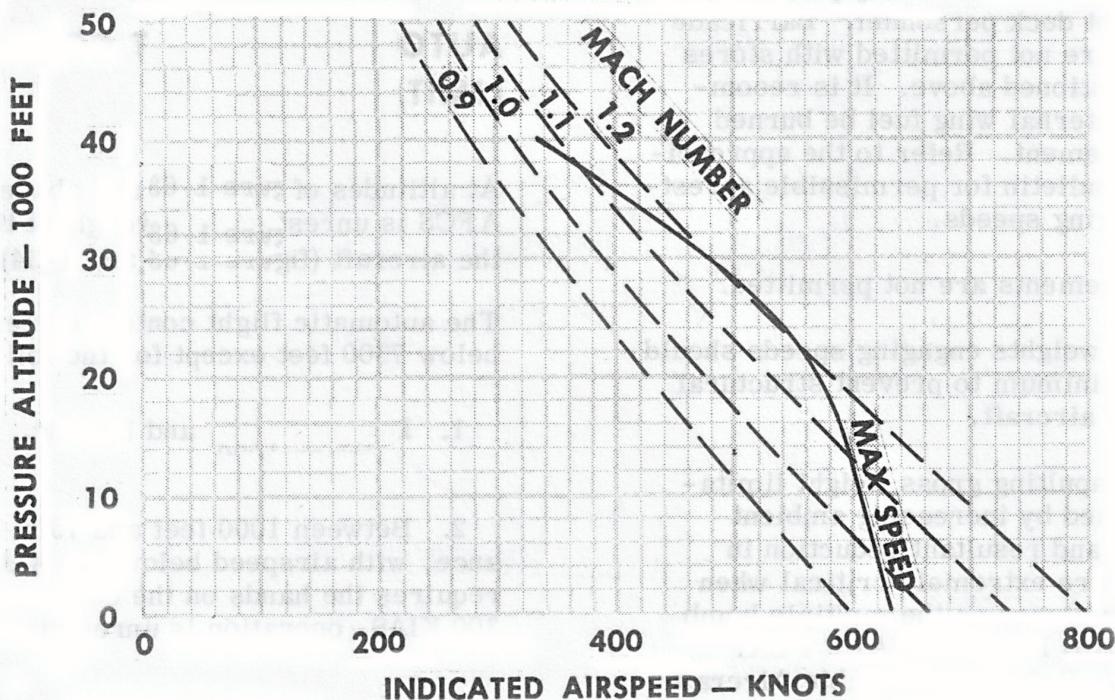
These numbers often came into play on test hops, but it was rare to fly a test flight with no external stores. So, if you were configured with a 300gal drop tank(s), the limits were 575 IAS and Mach 0.9. Most Skyhawk pilots know, with external stores in a steep descent from 36,000' (flight test target altitude), the airspeed/Mach indicator needle would easily exceed the .9 mark, but then “glue” itself to the high drag found at Mach 1.0, while the IAS rapidly changed within the same indicator during the decent. Exceeding the store limit? Yes, but many of us did it and that's what we would see and mostly no more. To refresh your memory of what the A-4 airspeed/Mach indicator looked like, see the photo above-right.



A-4 airspeed/Mach indicator

MODEL: A-4E/F
ENGINE: J52-P-8A

DATA AS OF: 15 NOVEMBER 1972
DATA BASIS: NAVAIRSYSCOM



Since the Skyhawk was built with an elevator for pitch control and no movable horizontal stabilizer (except for trim), there was a temporary loss of elevator control until lower altitudes and drag drove the shock wave back forward of the elevator. Then, there was the reverse Mach Tuck, pitching the nose up slightly on the way downhill, decelerating through Mach .95, but these things were mild and quickly gone during speed loss.

What about that reference to the Skyhawk being a transonic airplane? Transonic flight begins at Mach 0.8 and ends at 1.2, where supersonic flight begins. (*Introduction to Applied Aerodynamics*, Gregg Mueller, CDR, USN, 1957)

★ TAPS ★

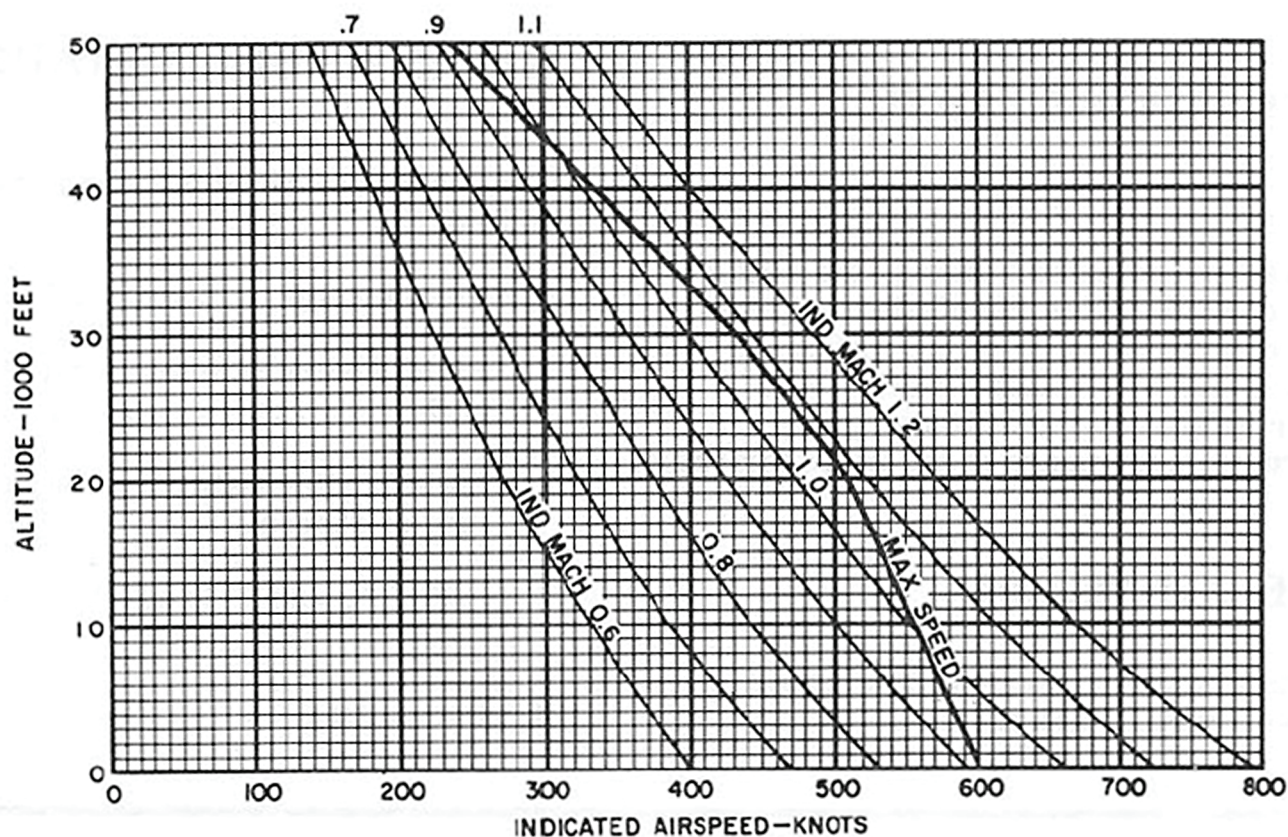
For lists of A-4 KIA and operational losses, members can sign into <http://skyhawk.org> and go to the "Ready Room."



TAPS notices may be sent to Dave Dollarhide
davedollarhide@msn.com

Henry Blecha, 21 October 2021, Pasadena, CA
 Ronald V. Boch, 23 February 2023, Somis, CA
 RADM Steve Briggs, 4 February, 2023, Long Beach, CA
 Paul Davies, 8 March 2022, Beaufort, SC
 William "Bill" Deans, 27 April 2022, Fayetteville, NC
 Brooks Dyer, 12 February, 2023, Princeton, NJ
 Maurice D. "Fitz" Fitzgerald, 14 December, 2022, Seattle, WA
 Fred Harshbarger, 7 February 2023, Opelika, AL
 Jack "Red" Jewell, 25 December 2022, McLean, VA
 Pete Krueger, 24 January 2023, Pine, CO
 Grady Loveless, 14 September 2022, LaGrange, GA
 Jim Mattly, 11 January 2023, Houston, TX
 John "Stoney" Morgan, 10 January 2023, Wilmington, NC
 Jim "XO" Mulligan, 18 January, 2023, Lawrence, MA
 Terry Tiernan, 24 December 2022, Bradenton, FL
 Jack Tuttle, 14 December 2022

Comparing the J-65 powered A-C/L chart, the numbers were less, with the permissible Mach at 1.08 and the sea level IAS at 600.



Send comments and possible future **"TRIVIA ANYONE"** to Dave Dollarhide: davedollarhide@msn.com.

SIZE DOES MATTER

Modelers' Corner

By Gil Hodges

~ Plastic Tinkertoys ~

The venerable A-4 Skyhawk has many fond nicknames besides “Tinkertoy,” also being known as “Heinemann’s Hot Rod,” “Kiddiecar,” “Bantam Bomber” and most generally, “Scooter.” Regardless of the label, it’s one of THE classic jets of the last century. It broke molds, set records and left a service record and combat legacy the envy of many of the more advanced aircraft it served beside. The world-famous Blue Angels used the Skyhawk to wow crowds for more than a decade, adding to its fame and popularity. But then if you’re reading this, you already KNOW that! The focus of this article is to shed a little light on something many of you may not be so aware of, the Skyhawk’s legacy in the world of plastic model building.

To begin, let me give a very short and generalized history of plastic scale model building. I’m sure most of you are very aware of the plastic modeling hobby and many of you probably built plastic model planes as a part of your early interest in aviation. Injection molded plastic took over as the main material for model kits in the early 1950s. Most of the kits for the next 10 or 15 years were as much toys as they were scale models, with many of them only vaguely resembling their subject. Beginning in the late 1960s, model kits started being more sophisticated. They had more detailing, more accurate outlines, better markings included and few or no working features. They started resembling “scale models” as opposed to toys to be slapped together over a weekend. Model builders themselves became more sophisticated once they realized they could build true scale models of their favorite subjects. Clubs formed, magazines were issued, and reference material became available to help builders improve and/or correct what came in the box and to add detailing that brought their builds to life. Hobby companies started making model paints that matched the real colors on subjects, making it possible to finish models in accurate schemes. That trend has continued to this day. The engineering and detailing of the kits being produced now are light years ahead of where things started in the 50’s. To put it in another frame of reference, the plastic model kits of today are like the 5th generation jets of today as compared to the 1st generation jets of the Korean War!

The down side to that is that the hobby is no longer a “kids hobby.” The days of being able to buy a plastic model kit with your weekly allowance is a thing of the past. The higher cost of the kits today reflects import costs (almost none are made in the USA anymore), the higher quality molding and engineering, the higher number of parts provided for greater detailing, better quality and more accurate decals to apply to the model, as well as better instructions that provide much more help towards accurately building and finishing the kit.

I’m going to share some of the history of the A-4 in plastic, though I’ll have to qualify that a bit, as my forte is 1/48 scale (“quarter scale”) modeling and most of my remarks will be about kits in that scale. The Skyhawk has been molded in every scale generally available, but mainly in 1/144, 1/72, 1/48, and 1/32; the industry’s



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

“standard” scales. Manufacturers worldwide have issued Scooter kits knowing that its combat history and wide variety of markings will sell kits!

It’s probably no surprise that as famous and popular as the Skyhawk is, it’s been a mainstay in the plastic modeling world since it first took to the air! Lindberg, an early model company famous for releasing many of the “new” planes as soon as they were being test-flown in the 50s, released their 1/48 A4D-1 in 1956! It was very crude by today’s standards and was molded as one of the prototypes, complete with the nose instrument probe. There was no interior to speak of, just a pilot to glue in the cockpit. It had landing gear, but no wheel wells, and had under wing



rockets the Skyhawk never mounted. But, the Scooter had a start in 1/48, and kids and model builders were introduced to the US Navy’s newest light weight “Bantam Bomber.” Other companies followed suit through the late 50s, putting out Skyhawk kits in all of the scales, including “box scales” (models sized to fit into a company’s standard kit box). In general, all of the plastic Tinkertoys were more “toys” than actual scale models, though this didn’t matter much to the builders of that time. The Skyhawk was already as popular to build as it was to fly among Navy and Marine pilots!

New “Scooter” kits were continually issued in 1/72, 1/48, and the Japanese metric system of 1/50 throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. All of the major kit manufacturers and most of the small ones all put out Skyhawk models of varying degrees of quality, but generally always getting better. Of course, this was also at the height of the Vietnam War and the Skyhawk was right there in the front lines making news and being



featured often on the nightly news and that also kept it front and center in model builders minds.

The next big step in modeling for the A-4 came in the mid '70s with the release of the Monogram 1/48 A-4E/F. This was the first true "scale model" of the Skyhawk and a leap forward in quality over all other Scooter kits of the time. It had a detailed cockpit including the quilting on the sides, wheel wells with plumbing showing, brake lines included on the landing gear, separate flaps and speed brakes and a lot of the other little details missing in many previous kits. Monogram further capitalized on the popularity of the A-4 by releasing a Blue Angels version soon afterward when, the Blues switched to the Skyhawk in 1975. An Italian company,



ESCI, soon released their similarly detailed 1/48 Skyhawks to give modelers like myself even more choices to build. This was followed very soon afterward with the impressive Hasagawa A-4E/F kit and TA-4J trainer version in the larger 1/32 scale, to cap off the '70s. By 1980 there were some very nice scale-model Scooters on the market and that also included newer kits in the smaller 1/72 scale, which had progressed along with the larger scale kits.

To push the story forward, plastic kit makers have progressively released better detailed and more sophisticated kits of the Skyhawk for the last 40 years. The 1/48 Hasagawa Skyhawks are considered to be top of the line for quarter scale as of this writing, along with their Eduard brand releases, which include extra Eduard detailing sets for the Hasagawa moldings in an Eduard box. Fujimi has released some top-flight Scooter kits in 1/72, and Trumpeter has released more modernly molded 1/32 Skyhawks. The "Tinkertoy" continues to be as popular in plastic today as it was during its heyday!

Something that goes hand in hand with the history of the A-4 in plastic and its evolution towards better and more sophisticated kits, is all of the variants

of the Skyhawk. In the early days, kit makers paid little attention to the external details that made the difference between an A, B, C, E, or F. The same went for the under-wing stores. They'd supply some rockets or bombs to hang there, regardless of whether they resembled the real ordnance, or if it had even been dropped or fired by a Scooter! Not so today! As model builders grew in sophistication along with the kits, they started demanding greater accuracy in airframes, ordnance and the markings supplied for them. You can now get just about every A-4 variant Douglas ever built in plastic, especially in 1/48 scale. There's the smooth sided rudder on the A-4A, the short-nosed A-4B with the ribbed rudder and refueling probe. The upgraded A-4C now has the longer nose and the A-4E displays the splitter plates for the intakes and more under wing sta-



tions. The A-4F has the avionics hump and slightly larger "Fox" intakes. The A-4M comes with its cranked refueling probe, lumps and bumps of antennas, as well as the spoilers on the wing top. Even the Israeli versions come with the differences in the guns and the tail. You can get a plain TA-4F/J trainer or the more advanced OA-4M Marine Skyhawk. Modeler builders now know that a Blue Angels A-4F model has to have the slats glued "up," while their TA-4J #7 has working slats that should be down on the ground, not to mention the Blue Angel boarding ladder stowage and smoke generators. You get the idea! The under-wing thingies are also now much better, reflecting the real ordnance used in Vietnam, accurately shaped drop tanks (with and without tail fins!), era correct Sidewinders, or even the ACMI missile simulator used by the Aggressors. All of these give the model builder a wide range of cool stuff to hang on the "Hot Rod."

Another contributing factor to the continuing popularity of the Skyhawk is the wide variety of markings on A-4s throughout the decades and as

applied by different countries. There's the classic gull gray over white scheme it wore for most of its career, which coincided with one of the most colorful periods in markings in US Navy history. Bright CAG colors, squadron patches and colors evolved, followed by eye-catching 1976 Bicentennial markings all go hand in hand with today's Scooter models! The bright training colors on the TA-4s and the gorgeous Blue Angels scheme still sell a lot of kits. Later generation model builders who grew up with tactical paint schemes dominating the news can do the last Marine Skyhawks in overall gray. Then, there's the Aggressor A-4s, with their myriad of camo schemes and colors in real squadron use and even the movies. Want to do "Jester's" aggressor Scooter from Top Gun? That's available to builders! Add to that the cool looking Israeli schemes, Argentinian markings for the Falklands War, as well as the many other variants from all of the countries that flew the



A-4 and modelers world-wide generally have something to build that they can identify with.

There's an old saying in the aviation community that "If it looks good, it'll fly good." The A-4's good looks ushered in a new design era in the US Navy that not only looked cool, it outperformed its contemporaries and earned the title "classic" in aviation history. It's no wonder that with its cool looks, outstanding combat record, and variety of colors and markings that it's been a popular build for modelers for almost 70 years!

I've included some pictures of a few of my 1/48 scale model builds. Trust me, among my peers these builds are strictly average. There are some truly amazing model builders that take this hobby to a level more resembling fine art and deserving of spots in our best aviation museums. Hopefully my builds will at least convey the attraction of building an A-4 and the varieties that are available to Tinkertoy builders like myself! Cheers and God bless! 



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