

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 30-2



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US Navy Fighter Weapons School, 1973

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Grand Sierra Resort, Reno

Summer 2024

<https://skyhawk.org>



THE EDITOR'S GOTTA GO

From Dave "Hide" Dollarhide Editor



Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

A few years ago, our previous editor of *The A-4Ever Skyhawk Journal*, Bob "Raven" Hickerson asked me to help him in working with photographs. I replied, "I'll be happy to help, Bob, but there is a condition. At this point in my life, I don't care to be in charge of any organization."

I had submitted articles in the past and respected Raven as one of the most even tempered and capable people I've ever known. I was delighted to assist him,

but as time went by, he began having some memory issues and eventually was forced to ask me to replace him. It was a time of need and I couldn't say no.

Fast forwarding, I'll be 83 on my next birthday in March, 2025 and at the most recent Board of Directors meeting, I let them know that it will be the time for me to step aside. I feel terrible in doing so, but my family calls.

There is plenty of time for me to train a replacement, so I'm hoping someone will step up to the task. The magazine is very important to our members and I fear for the future of our association without it. Over the years, it has become a primary tool for us in "going down memory lane" of our collective past's.

If anyone is interested, member or not, I can be contacted at: davedollarhide@msn.com or cell, 904-449-6432



NEW MEMBERS

Lillian Williams, Jackson, MS

Luc Menard, Ontario, Canada

Michael Mulligan, Santa Fe, NM

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

A-4 Skyhawkers Reunion!

USMC Skyhawkers have a reunion planned at the Hilton and Holiday Inn Resorts, Pensacola Beach, FL, 11-13 November 2024 (Mon-Wed)! All drivers, maintainers and aficionados welcome!

Point of contact is Mark Williams at rogerwilco14@gmail.com, 10432 Button Willow Dr, Las Vegas, NV 89134, or 702-778-5010.



SAVE THE DATES!



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

• Spring-2024 •

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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, msleef@gmail.com. Paper issues printed by Acculink, Greenville, NC.

On the Cover: F-11F-1 Tiger in the colors of Aviation Training Unit 222 during a takeoff departure in afterburner. Date and location unknown. Credit assumed USN.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net

■ **From: Maurice A. Valkema**

Subject: Essex Class Aircraft Carriers Help

When did VA Attack Squadrons with Skyhawks stop flying from the bigger Aircraft Carriers and only fly from the smaller Essex Class Aircraft Carriers? For example, the F-8 Crusader in VF Squadrons only flew from Essex Class Aircraft Carriers after 1965.

F-8 Crusader information found in the following paper: Journal of Aeronautical History, Paper No. 2018/02, an Examination of the F-8 Crusader through Archival Sources.

Professor Michael Weaver, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base

From: Editor

The A-4 never stopped being deployed aboard Essex Class (27C) carriers for any reason, except for being replaced by the A-7. It had nothing to do with the size of the ships. On the other hand, F-8's became tied to all of the 27C carriers as the F-4 (The F-8 replacement) was too large and unsuitable for the smaller boats.

■ **From: Sid Linton and Shand Gause**

Copy: John Cooper, Jim Pate, Virgil Tedder

Subject: A-4Ever cover photo of RAN A-4G aboard HMAS Melbourne

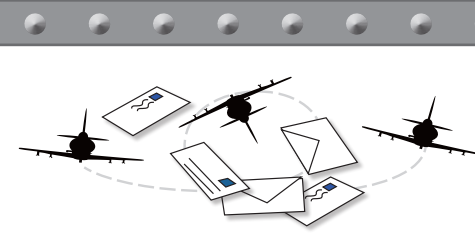
Great picture, nose strut slammed down too hard? I hope you all noticed the cool picture on the front of A4Ever. The hook has engaged but the nose wheel is not on the deck yet.



That's cool timing in probably a 1/4 second window. He is cocked up so he might have even engaged the wire before the main gear touched down. Pretty picture though.

From: Editor

The parameters on the Melbourne were very tight, (at 702') even compared to a 27C (at 880') and the cross-deck-pendants were smaller in diameter, according to Ripper.



From: Bob "Ripper" Stumpf, USN, who flew A-4s with the RAN

Subject: A-4 Hook to ramp on HMAS Melbourne

I sent out a mass mailing to the RAN A-4 crowd and asked the question. Boy, what a response. Trouble is, they came back with answers ranging from 6 feet to 16 feet! My own calculations put it in the 8.5'-9.0' range, not knowing the actual hook-to-eye (*I was talking hook to ramp and Ripper was using a Hook to Eye number, scary small either way. - ed*) Most of the responses were consistent with that. I had forgotten, until this drill, that the target wire was number four.

■ **From: Tommy H Thomason**

In a question previously posted in the Winter 2021-22 "Journal" article, aviation author Thomason asked if anyone could identify the pilot in this photo (paraphrase by Editor)

From: Olen Akers



The pilot is Colonel Ronald "Doc" Blanchard that started flying the A-4 in 1958 at El Toro with VMA-311 and moved to VMA-121 for a 16 month deployment to Iwakuni in January

1960. I served with him during that time.

■ **From: Max Bolin**

Subject: Looking For an Article -- The Death Flight

I recently listened to your episode on "So There I Was" Podcast. You briefly mentioned a story about some young

Marine aviators on their way to Westpac and the event was dubbed "The Death Flight." I am almost certain my father was flying one of those A4s that day! I am currently a member of Skyhawk.org but I can't seem to find the article. Is it on the website? If so, do you have the name of said article? (Max was provided with the pdf file.)

From: Editor

The Death Flight 1 and 2 were published in issue 27-1, then part 3 of the story was told in issue 27-2 by the Air Force tanker copilot, who also had been a Marine A-4 pilot. It was a fun series generated in our magazine with a small-world flare connecting you and others to the story. The original story was written by Rick "Peachy" Keene, who passed a number of years back. I hope you find that your father was involved.

■ **From: Roy "Howdy" Edwards**

I enjoyed the latest copy of The A-4Ever magazine email comments from (now deceased -Ed) Bill "Jigger" Egen, "Hell Jelly!" Jigger and I served in VMAT-103 in Yuma MCAS some-time during July 1970 to August 1972. My wife and I attended Bill's Memorial in Cherry Point. He will be missed.

Anyway, the article brought back some memories from my tour in MAG-12 Chu Lai, Vietnam from 1/1/1969 to 1/14/1970. My memory challenges me on when exact events occurred. I guess I am lucky in some respects, better than no memory at all.

1st MAW G 3 asked MAG-12 if we could deliver CS (tear-ed) Gas on some suspected NVA tunnels near Khe Sanh. Of course, the answer was, "You better believe we can." Our Ops-O and Ordnance guys were tasked with coming up with a solution. Please don't hold me to the facts of time and dates. I just remember that I was scheduled in one of the first division flights to deliver the CS gas. The ordnance solution was to use the MK-77 empty nape canister with a flap opening of about 18"x24." For ballast they used sandbags filled with white South China Sea beach sand. To secure and close the flap opening, they used duct tape. Ops and weapons officers determined that we should use the normal level delivery parameters of napalm. We would fly in division echelon for release on the leads drop for maximum coverage. Shortly after getting airborne, we noticed that the air-stream and vibration caused the duct tape to loosen. Then the flap opened into the wind stream and some of the bags of sand and CS started to come out of the canister and catch on the MER and wing slats. The lead immediately slowed down to something less than 250 kts and we were able to contain the sandbags and CS. So, it was determined that a cruise and delivery airspeed of 225 kts worked just fine.

Maybe this is how duct tape got the name "200-MPH tape" in the NASCAR world?



Give Me One More Day

Give me one more day
To fly like a kid at play
Out on the envelope's edge
Using my whole bag of tricks
To get on the Skipper's six.

Give me one more day
To jump in the fray,
To breach the enemy shore,
Fly through missiles and flak,
Hit the target, and make it back.

Give me one more day
To sight the ship miles away,
A speck on a sparkling sea;
To fly the break low and fast
And make one more perfect pass.

Give me one more night
Of Nav Air delights—
Pitching deck and vertigo;
No land, no tanker near,
No fuel, no hope... no fear.

Give me one more day
At Cubi Point, Subic Bay
In that famous Club,
Toasting friends old and dear
High above the carrier pier.

Give me one more day
To run up the gangway
With seconds to spare,
As the ship gets underway
For just... one more day.

Inky Barley
(Don Purdy)

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

Read?

you think
we read?

BLACK LION ONE Topgun Trailblazer

By Donald "Duck" Auten
Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
Amazon ebook and hardcopy
Reviewed by CAPT Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

Author Donald "Duck" Auten's first book about RADM (ret) John Monroe "Hawk" Smith, *Roger Ball*, was published in 2006. Skyhawk Director, Mark Williams, wrote a very favorable review on the biography in the Summer 2007 issue of *The A-4Ever Skyhawk Journal*, so it was a good lead-in for us to take the opportunity to review Duck's second writing about the career of Hawk Smith.

The focus in *Black Lion One*, *Topgun Trailblazer* is his command tour of the VF-213 Black Lions, flying the "Swing Wing" F-14 Tomcat.

So why is the *A-4Ever Skyhawk Journal* promoting a book about the fighter community, Top Gun, VF-213 and the F-14 anyway? The answer is an exceptional leader called "Hawk," who made his mark in bettering air to air combat skills and equipment.

The Vietnam "conflict" had exposed the fact that readiness was deficient in many ways. The Navy found itself with the powerful Phantom, a fighter with no cannons and a poor turn rate, replacing the Crusader, widely known as the "Gun Fighter."

Under the umbrella of safety, air to air combat training of the day had a mindset more focused on what flight crews couldn't do, instead of what they needed to do to enhance combat skills. OPNAV spoke in terms like "Defensive Air

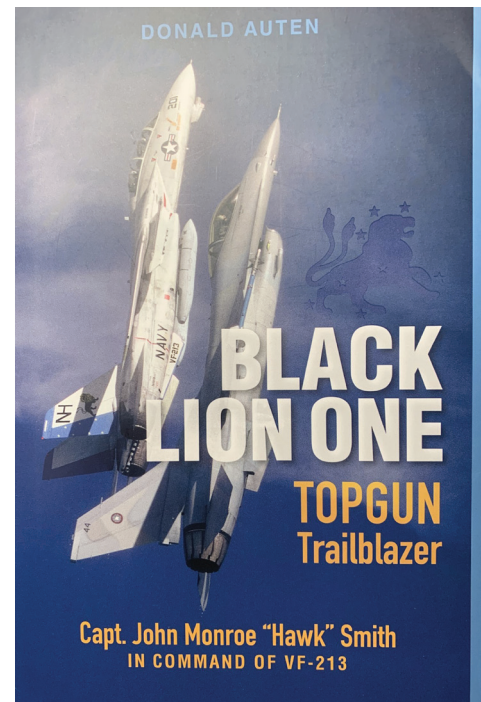
Combat Training" "one defensive turn, then knock it off" was the byword for Attack squadrons, whose secondary mission was air to air combat. (They forgot to tell that to T. R. Swartz, who bagged a Mig-17 with a Zuni rocket, while flying an A-4.)

Vietnam losses grew and "kill ratios" lagged, but along the way, there were some slow, but positive improvements made, like when the F-4S showed up with Automatic Maneuvering Flaps (AMF) and A-7s received the same improvements for the turn-rate issue. The most significant change of all was the establishment of the Navy's Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) in 1969.

With improved electronic weapons systems a given, the last corrective action from the Vietnam days was to provide a fighter with both "thrust to weight" and the much-needed turn rate. As we all know, that became the F-14 Tomcat, "The First Third Generation Fighter," which marked a new era for the Navy's fighter community. The "Big Fighter" also became the center-point of Hawk's flying career.



John Monroe "Hawk" Smith



Early on, Hawk received unique orders to VX-4 as a project pilot. A few years later, he was selected to become the XO/CO of "Topgun," with a bonus command awarded in 1978 of VF-213, a "fleet squadron," flying the Tomcat, which had to have been his most challenging and rewarding assignment.

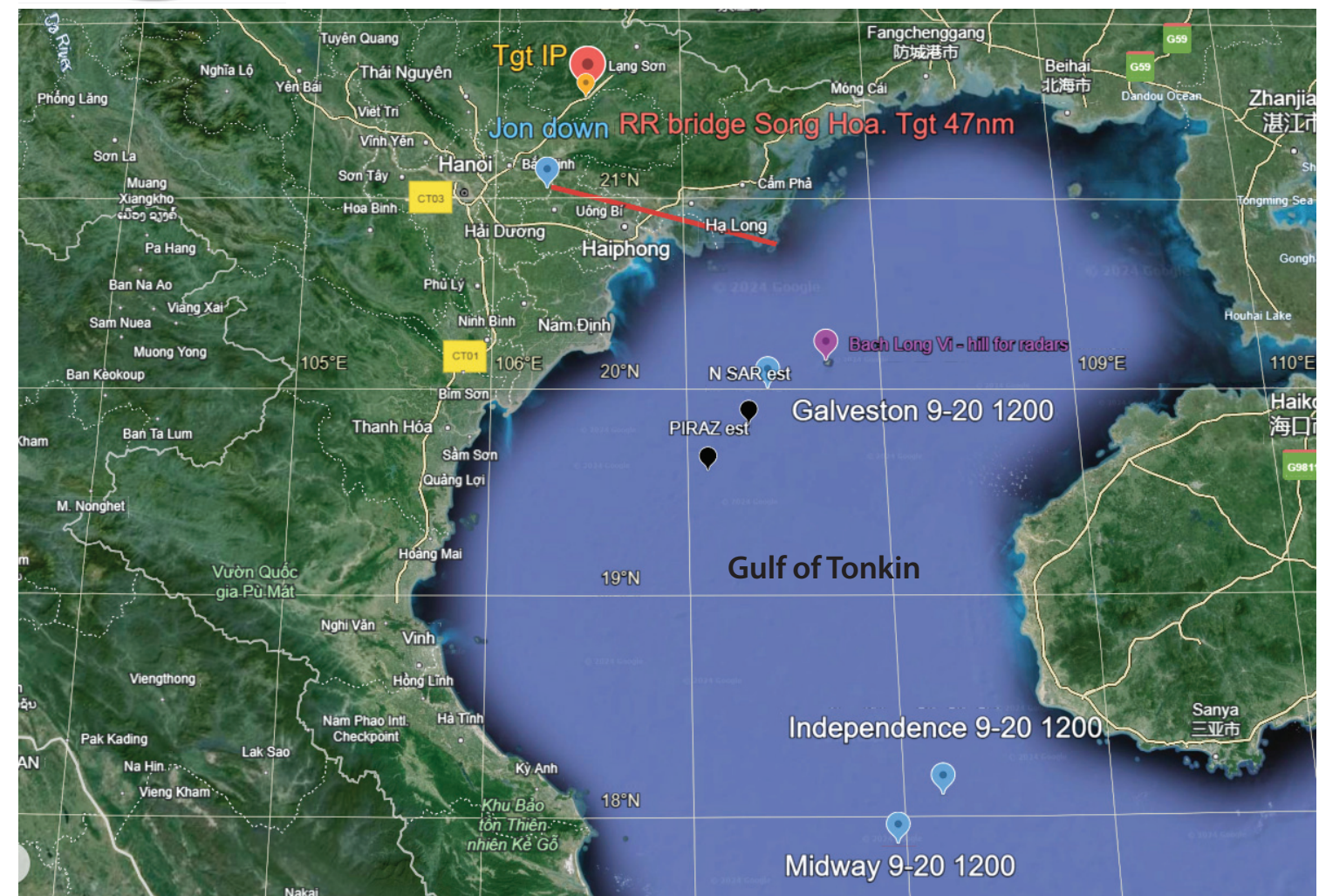
Author, Don "Duck" Auten expertly takes the reader through every challenge and success of Hawk's turn as the "Skipper" of 213. The reader becomes a fly-on-the-wall as Hawk becomes an envied leader, innovator, and expert Tomcat pilot. The reader learns what it's like in the complex world of carrier aviation at sea, with some five thousand people functioning as one to launch and recover airplanes.

Hawk's career gave him a unique opportunity to, not only lead, but provide solutions for what Vietnam had exposed. *Black Lion One – Topgun Trailblazer* tells that story exceptionally well. I thoroughly enjoyed the read and highly recommend Duck Auten's work.



The Seventh's First September 20, 1965

By Doug Bohs



Target, LTJG Harris' downed location and ships's positions on 20 September 1965

At the beginning of the Vietnam conflict there were two rail lines connecting Hanoi with Communist China. These were the Hanoi-Lao Cai and the Hanoi-Dong Dang rail lines with the latter carrying the heaviest traffic. "Operation Rolling Thunder" was a joint Seventh Fleet Navy and Air Force operation designed to slow the movement of war material from North to South Vietnam. Located 45 miles northeast of Hanoi on the Hanoi-Dong Dang line, the Cao Nung Railroad Bridge became the target of an Alpha Strike by Air Wing 7 of the carrier USS Independence. It was comprised of approximately 30 aircraft including one A-6 division, two A-4E divisions and aircraft from other squadrons with flak suppression,

TARCAP, BARCAP, tanker, radar and photo recon capability. On Yankee Station with the Independence was the carrier USS Midway and on the North SAR Point was the Guided Missile Cruiser USS Galveston. On 20 September 1965 the strike group launched from the "Indy" at 10:00 hours.

After refueling, the strike group passed over the Gulf of Tonkin at 20,000 feet then dropped to 3,500 feet during the run-in to the target. Before reaching the target, they would "pop-up" to 12,000 feet to drop their bomb load. The drop to 3,500 feet was an attempt to avoid the threat of several SAM sites they would encounter. The strike group was led by the VA-75 "Sunday Puncher" A-6s, with the VA-86 "Sidewinder" A-4Es and the VA-72 "Blue Hawk" A-4Es in trail. *continued...*

As the strike group approached the target, a SAM missile exploded near the lead A-6 filling the air with a huge brownish/orange cloud. Someone called SAMS! BREAK! BREAK! This was quickly followed by a launch of four more SAM missiles, several flak-bursts and the strike group dove for the deck. For a short time, it was mass confusion with planes turning and diving in all directions. The initial point for the run into the target was a small reservoir.

LTJG Jon Harris of VA-72 spotted the reservoir and joined several aircraft trying to circle the reservoir and avoid a mid-air. It was at this time Harris felt a movement of his aircraft that was “just different.” Following the lead A-6’s, Harris started climbing back to altitude. Over the target he dropped his bomb load, started “jinking” to avoid being hit and headed east to the coast. He joined with an A-4 from VA-86 and they looked each other over for battle damage. Seeing none, the other A-4 took the lead and they headed out to “feet wet”. They soon joined an A-6 and flew a loose formation toward the coast. Harris was just beginning to relax when he received the shock of his life; a “Fire Warning” light. His next indication of trouble was the smell of burning electrical insulation coming through his oxygen mask. Next, he felt the rudder pedals “slip” as they moved back a short distance. His aircraft started a roll to the right and Harris slapped the stick twice to stop the roll but the stick was frozen. Now he was convinced the fire had burned through the hydraulic lines. He learned later the back half of his aircraft was in flames and had separated behind the cockpit just as he ejected. The ejection occurred in a 90 degree bank as the plane continued to roll.

Suddenly everything went quiet. He saw his plane burning on the ground and noticed he was floating into a valley. To his right was what appeared to be a village and he pulled on the risers to steer clear of it. He came down into some medium-sized trees, short of the village and prepared for a tree landing. His parachute hung up in the trees and he stopped falling just as his feet touched the ground. Harris noticed an A-4 circling above and was confident his position had been given to Search and Rescue. He released his harness,



VA-72 A-4E.

stepped out of the chute and compulsively looked at his watch. The time was 1229.

LTJG Harris checked his survival radio and noticed the antenna had broken off which left it inoperable. Parachuting into the trees he knew it would be a liability. Without a radio to assist in guiding a helicopter to another location he was reluctant to move too far away. Flares, “smoke” and tracers from his pistol were all an option, but depending on the enemy’s position, could be risky. Every minute lost by RESCAP aircraft and the helo in spotting him, as well as finding a hover location, could make the difference

between a successful rescue, death, or imprisonment. In order to reach a compromise position between his parachute and a possible rescue site he started climbing the increasingly steep slope of the valley. Leaving the trees and bushes he found himself in elephant grass about waist high. He continued climbing until he was able to see his parachute between himself and the village. This was going to be his location for a rescue attempt. After about 30 minutes, while collecting his thoughts and organizing himself for a rescue, he heard the welcome sound of propeller-driven aircraft.

The aircraft were two VA-25 A-1H



A-1H VA-25 piloted by LTJG “Woody” Woodbury.

Skyraiders from the USS *Midway* piloted by CDR Harold “Harry” Ettinger (Canasta 1) and LTJG Laurence “Woody” Woodbury (Canasta 2). Ettinger and Woodbury had been loitering fifty to seventy-five miles southeast of Hanoi. Their mission would also take them inside the SAM and AAA envelope. Normally, the first Midway RESCAP A-1’s would be launched at 0600. Due to the scale and time of this Alpha Strike the *Midway* launched their RESCAP aircraft at 0930. About 30 minutes after LTJG Harris was on the ground, Ettinger and Woodbury received Harris’ coordinates from Red Crown/Piraz and were headed inland to begin their search. Their aircraft were equipped with two 300-gal drop tanks, four rocket pods/w 19 rockets each and four 20-mm cannons. They received AAA fire on the way to Harris’ position but did not take the time to determine its exact source. Flying about 200 feet above the valley they quickly located Harris’ parachute. While they were not able to see or make radio contact with Harris, CDR Ettinger stayed on scene while LTJG Woodbury flew back to the coast to rendezvous with a rescue helicopter.

On September 19th, the day before the Alpha Strike, the Cruiser USS *Galveston* came alongside the USS *Midway*. An eight-man detachment from Midway’s Helicopter Squadron HC-1 Detachment Alpha was transferred to the *Galveston* with all of the support equipment required to conduct helicopter operations from the cruiser. The helo, a Kaman UH-2K Seasprite was now assigned to the USS *Galveston*, which was the flagship for RADM R.F. Dubois, Commander Task Group 70.8 and Commander of Cruiser Destroyer Flotilla 9. The HC-1 flight crew included the CO, LCDR Wes Wetzel, LTJG Kent Vandervelde and ADJ1 Charles Bowman. That same day the *Galveston*’s ship’s log showed the departure of RADM Dubois

on Helo #35 for the Midway. LCDR Wetzel was the pilot. RADM Dubois and LCDR Wetzel met with RADM Marshall W. White, Commander Carrier Division Seven, and *Midway* Captain James M. O’Brien. LCDR Wetzel was given a special mission in this meeting. What follows was the result of that meeting.

Early on the morning of the 20th, *Galveston* had steamed to its strike location with HC-1’s Helo #35 sitting on the helipad. Wetzel and Vandervelde were in CIC listening as the Alpha Strike progressed. ADJ1 Bowman had their helo on external power listening to the chatter on the guard channel. Almost immediately after hearing an A-4 pilot was down Wetzel, Vandervelde and Bowman were in the helo with the rotors spinning. They had no map of the area and no rescue training in a “jungle” environment. If someone from the *Galveston* hadn’t handed a Thompson sub-machine gun to Bowman they would have had no armament. Every

rescue they had made to date was over open water. The *Galveston*’s ship’s log recorded their departure at 12:57; just twenty-eight minutes after LTJG Harris checked his watch.

Helo #35 had almost reached the coast when they came under enemy fire from a small island. They made it to the coast and rendezvoused with LTJG Woodbury. They took fire again on the way inland. The dense black smoke indicated it was probably 57mm. Nasty stuff! Woodbury led the helicopter about 20 miles inland to Harris’ location. The area was sparsely populated and they could see an occasional fire. Meanwhile *Galveston* was making flank speed toward the coast. The helo made three passes over Harris’ chute but failed to see him. After their last pass Woodbury reported sighting orange smoke halfway up the hill. LTJG Harris had been trying to light a flare since he spotted the helo but the cap just would not snap off. Finally, it lit. Out of here! With high hopes *continued...*



Eight-man HC-1 Det A assigned to USS *Galveston* for Alpha Strike



HC-1 Det.A Kaman UH-2K "Seasprite" landing on USS Galveston.

he waited for them to go into a hover over his position, but they flew over his position and disappeared over the top of the hill! Wetzels and Vandervelde knew if they tried to move up the slope of the hill after LTJG Harris was in the "horse collar," the hot humid air would present a lift problem. (When a helicopter tries to hover on the side of a hill, the ground effect wants to slide down the hill and you lose lift.) To increase their chances, they left Harris' position to dump fuel in an effort to reduce their weight as much as possible. Helo #35 had dumped a substantial amount of fuel and was down to 650 lbs. While circling on the other side of the hill and dumping fuel they came under small arms fire. They alerted Ettinger and Woodbury who rolled in and strafed the area. The firing stopped.

They wanted to keep the A/C above the ridge line in-order to "wave-off" straight ahead. With 100 feet of cable out they were still too high for Harris to reach the collar. They gradually lowered the helo until the sling touched the ground and Bowman announced Harris was in the collar. As they winched in the cable they began to lose power. They dumped the nose, "kicked right rudder" and slid down the other side of the ridge with Harris dangling about 30 feet below the helo but now about 400 feet in the air. They stopped in mid-air and reeled in their man. With the encouragement of Canasta 1, they climbed to 3,000 feet and headed back with Harris safely in the helo.

When they crossed the main road along the coastline, they again came under fire from 57mm with about 20

black puffs appearing at 2 o'clock. Vandervelde grabbed the stick, both saying later they thought there was "some kind of maneuver" they should have been doing. When they were dumping fuel they had called *Galveston*, and advised them to keep closing as they would be arriving low (fuel) state. They landed with 2 minutes of fuel until red light. The total elapsed time from when Harris checked his watch when he touched the ground until he was safely aboard the *Galveston* was 2 hours 5 minutes.

They checked the helicopter for damage and found one round had penetrated the tail pylon "under" the tail rotor. To pass through the section of the helicopter pointed out, the round had to pass between the spinning rotor blades. A hit on a rotor blade



ADJ1 Bowman, LCDR Wetzels and LTJG Vandervelde inspecting bullet hole in tail pylon.

would probably have taken them down. The next day Wetzels, Vandervelde and Bowman returned Harris to the *Independence*. The "Indy" was in stand down. The two carriers on Yankee Station were doing alternate midnight to noon flight status. When LTJG Vandervelde landed #35 on the flight deck a loud cheer went up and a crowd rushed forward and surrounded Jon as he stepped out of the helicopter (Photo of Harris and Indy Captain Kennedy). Soon there was a lot of back slapping and hand-shaking with Vandervelde, Wetzels and Bowman. When things quieted down they headed back to *Midway*.

Soon after landing on *Midway* LCDR Wetzels was told he was scheduled to have an interview with CBS news. While preparing for the interview he was told the Admiral had classified the mission. Naturally the interview did not go as initially planned. Later that evening, LCDR Wetzels, LTJG Vandervelde and ADJ1 Bowman were invited to dine with Admiral White and Captain O'Brien. After finishing their meal, a CBS cameraman entered. They were all awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Admiral White pinned the medal on all three of them.



LTJG Harris being welcomed aboard USS Independence by Captain Kennedy.

When CDR Ettinger and LTJG Woodbury landed on Midway they recorded a flight time of 6.5 hours. There was no cheering crowd to meet them, the flight deck crew directed them to their shut-down area and they debriefed as usual. Midway's big screws just kept turning. CDR Ettinger and LTJG Woodbury were each awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in early 1966 after returning to NAS Lemoore.

Considering the Pentagon's micro-management of the war, the decision by Admirals White and Dubois to re-assign a helicopter and crew from an aircraft carrier to a cruiser could be considered bold. There may have been an element of career risk involved had it not gone as planned, but it was after all, a war. LTJG Jon R Harris was the first US Navy pilot rescued on land, in the Vietnam War by an all-Navy team. *Not only was this a Seventh Fleet first, it was an all-Navy first.*

Appreciation: Thanks of course, to Laurence "Woody" Woodbury, Jon Harris and Kent Vandervelde. Woody provided the great "map" graphic, photos and helped with several proof readings. Jon sent Woody, Kent and me a copy of his book *Wings of the Morning*. The book provided some great detail. Jon also sent several photos. Kent of course provided the much needed helo rescue details and several photos. Thanks also to Holt Livesay of VA-25 whose log book provided the author with Woody's and LCDR Ettinger's names as the pilots on the RESCAP mission. Thanks to D.D. Smith who found Jon Harris for me. Thanks to Jack Woodul AKA Youthly Puresome. Believe it or not Jack flew the same mission as Jon and provided additional detail for the story. Doug Bohs

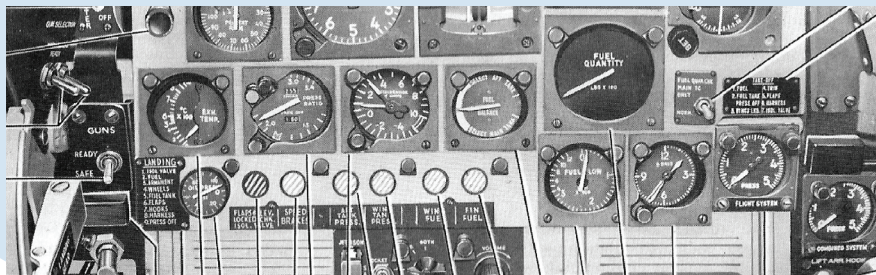
The Coke Bottle Jet

Grumman F-11A Tiger

A Personal Lookback by a Former A-4 Driver
Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

In January, 1966, with everything I owned stuffed in, I drove my six-year-old Vette into Beeville, TX and found the rather desolate, and straight road out to the Advanced Training base. The trip from Pensacola wasn't bad at all.

I was abruptly reminded of why this was such a big deal for me, when two Tigers came into the break over my head, followed by several F-9 Cougars. I was ecstatic with the thought that I was going to fly these historic jets, especially the F-11A Tiger. Students assigned to the Advanced Training down in Kingsville would only fly the F-9, as the Tigers had been "parked" there and I was thankful for my good fortune in having Beeville orders.



F-11 Flip Flop gauges

In my opinion, the Tiger looked like a perfect fighter, just what the Navy's first supersonic jet should look like. I'd seen it in an airshow once flown by the Blue Angels and loved how crazy tight they flew formation and vividly recall the throaty groaning sounds heard from the J-65 engines as the pilots modulated their throttles while in tight turns with the afterburner engaged at slower speeds.

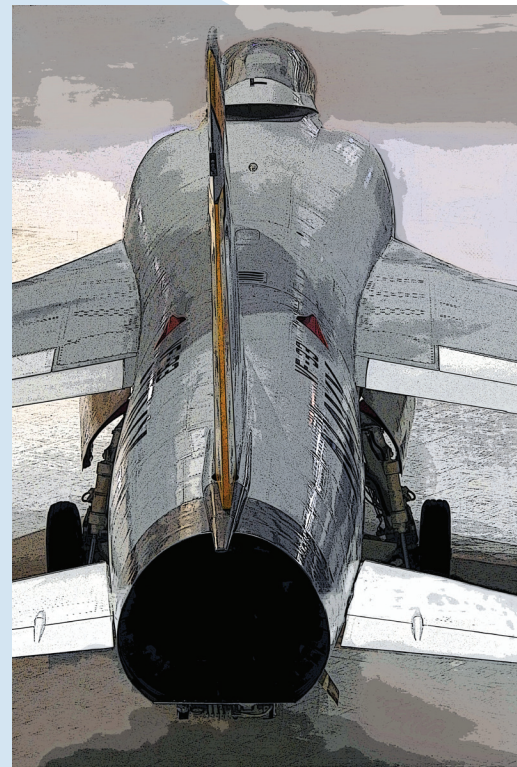


Noticeably thickened rudder of 141828

The J-65-W18, with 7,450 pounds of thrust was basically the same engine I would fly later in the early model A-4s, but the "burner" boosted the Tiger up to 10,500#. (By comparison, many years later, the A-4F would sport the J-52-P408, that developed 11,200# of thrust, with no afterburner.)

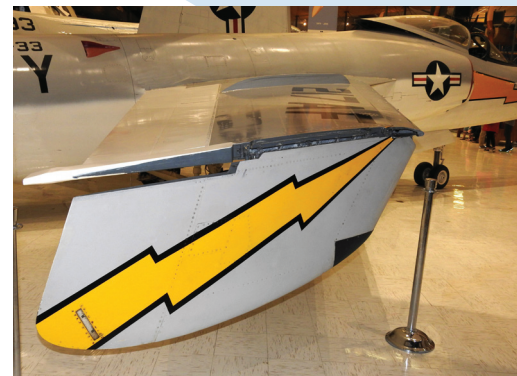
When engaging the single stage afterburner, the first sensation was an abrupt fall forward into the shoulder straps, as the nozzle opened and thrust was lost. That was followed by a gratifying slam back into the seat as the burner lit.

Basically, there was not much fuel in the wing, as it was probably the thinnest wings used on a jet fighter when the Grumman XF11F-1 prototype flew in July, 1954. (Oddly enough, the Douglas



The dramatic Area Rule principled, "Coke Bottle," fuselage shape is best seen from a mezzanine above and behind the Tiger in this stylized photo of 141828 at the National Naval Aviation Museum. In a cross-sectional look, the narrowing of the fuselage axis abeam the wings helped to reduce the effects of transonic drag rise during Mach .9 to 1.3.

XA4D-1 Skyhawk prototype first flew the month prior, in June, 1954) Fuel was contained in numerous tanks throughout the fuselage, including 50 gallons in the vertical stabilizer, called "fin fuel" and more contained in the engine intake "cheeks." The "fin fuel" indicator was a "flip flop" gauge that showed "Full," "Barber-Pole," or "Empty." Before moving the throttle



Wingtip of 141828 at the NNAM

outboard to select afterburner for take-off, the fin fuel was required to show Full or Barber-pole to confirm proper transfer. Some joked that they were thinking about putting fuel in the control stick also.

The wing tips were manually folded outside by pulling a lever underneath to allow the wingtip to hang on a hinge. Like the Cougar, the Tiger had no ailerons, only flight spoilers and on landing, the tail would be eased down to let the steel "tailskid" touch the runway while slowing down. Night landings were fun to watch at Beeville, with every landing trailing sparks down the runway.

A little noticed F-11 feature was a squared-off trailing edge of the rudder that gave the control surface a more responsive input.

FLYING THE JET

Following a lengthy syllabus in the Cougar at VT-25, I drove over to the VT-26 hangar to check-in for training. That led to an abbreviated ground-school and a simulator ride or two in a no-motion or visual simulator before



Colorized b&w Blue Angles photo of short nosed F-11s

the exciting first flight. I was chased by an instructor by the name of Gentry and he showed me some very interesting things on the first flight. I was in the lead on the takeoff, and as instructed, left the afterburner engaged till passing 5,000', designed to give students time to become oriented to the high thrust on departure. The normal altitude for

transitioning from "combat" to "military" thrust would then become 1,200', per normal ops.

We leveled somewhere between 10 to 15,000' and he asked me to maintain a speed of 300kts and trim the airplane slightly nose up while taking my hand off the stick and ease in the rudder to make the airplane roll. That's what it did and it was very much like a normal swept wing aileron roll. Using the stick, the airplane rolled right around the fuselage, with little to no adverse yaw detected -- a unique demonstration.

Also, flying close formation with another Tiger was a snap! It would sit there "like a log." Even with overlapped wings, there was no "lumpy" airflow from the other F-11. (No wonder the Blues loved the Tiger)

All of the VT-26 jets were "long nose" versions, indicating that the refueling probe in the front of the nose had been replaced with a concealed and extendable probe from the side that had been retrofitted. This left room for a rudimentary air to air radar ranging installation in the nose.

A serious flaw in the "skinny wing" was a leading-edge airflow separation problem, with no buffet or warning of stall in the landing phase, just an abrupt loss of lift. We were not permitted to select afterburner in the pattern, for fear of the well-known F-100 "Sabre Dance" stall accident phenomenon in which the airplane was in burner, extremely nose-high, with no altitude for recovery that led to a disaster.

Once, late in the day at Chase Field, while using the "Pamoloa Boards" (Two horizontal wooden boards spaced to align with a single board further away to line up for the correct glideslope), I allowed myself to become a touch slow and instantly felt the "bottom fall out" on a very short final. I jammed the throttle to the stop and braced for the hard touchdown, when the airplane suddenly entered ground affect and flared itself to the point that it became an unfelt "greaser," as I snatched the throttle to idle. I instantly understood why the airplane was said to be difficult at the "Boat."

The Tiger only spent about four years, or so, assigned to fleet squadrons, but its short range and the other problems sent it to the Advanced Training Command for students to fly. Go figure!

The Blue Angels flew the Tiger for close to twelve years, probably the longest of any unit, and when the F-11 flying ceased flying with VT-23 at NAS Kingsville, VT-26 became their only "spare parts locker" and source for replacement airplanes. The "jet" was perfectly suited for airshows with the Blues.

It was the coolest and most historic airplane I ever flew, a turning point for Naval Aviation, during an age when tactical jet technology was evolving rapidly.

Before we knew it, the Blues were flying Phantoms, then followed by the Skyhawk. Tigers were being burned up at fire fighting schools and sent to the boneyard. Skyhawks? Seventy years later, there are 45 still flying world-wide with militaries, contractors or in private hands. <https://www.skyhawk.org/node/49222>

continued...

Tiger TINS – Three Downs

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

By Dave "Hide" Dollarhide



VT-26 class photo

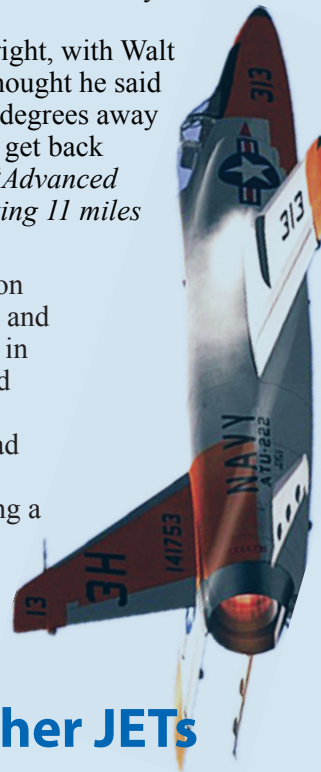
By that time, we needed to go to the air-to-air combat training area and Ed still had the low section lead. These were the days of each section fighting as one element, so as we turned in to begin, Jones and I had the altitude, thus speed advantage and quickly "picked up a few angles," Ed buried their noses in the turn and into the undercast, where they disappeared. Walt and I pulled up and began a slow speed circle, to conserve gas.

Suddenly, Ed's jet appeared just above the cloud tops below us in the top of a perfect hammerhead stall, the burner flame blowing from the tailpipe as though frozen in place for a split second before flopping back into the clouds -- and leaving the screenshot in my head, an image that has been putting a smile on my face for the past 58 years.

All three of us received "unsatisfactory, continue in stage" grades just before receiving our wings. Only two of us deserved it, but I think Nuga was happy to "pop" all three of us.

It was the second-to last flight before earning my wings and I was flying with some good friends, MARCAD Ed Birdwell, 1st Lt Walt Jones and our instructor, 1st Lt Mattingly "Nuga." Ed was leading with the instructor on his wing and I was the section lead, with Walt on my wing, to practice what was then called "Hunter/Killer" turns as a flight of four near Victoria, TX and following, we were to engage in 2v2 air to air combat training West of Beeville, TX. (The "Combat Spread" formation was yet to be created.)

Ed called for a 90 degree turn to the right, with Walt and I as the high section on the right. I thought he said 180 right, so we wound up diverging 90 degrees away from each other and it took us forever to get back together. Nuga wrote on my completed "Advanced F-11A Tactics" grading sheet, "After getting 11 miles behind, it took him all day to join up."



F-11A PILOTS WHO LATER FLEW A-4s and other JETs



T Sudberry/Bill "Jigger" Egen/J Counter



Steve Pollock



George "WP" Blossser/Barry Stegall



Jim Dowd/Gorden Hunter/Bob Griesser



Richard Cherba



RDT&E
CHINA LAKE

TIARA

Target-Illumination and Recovery Aid

From the files of Gary Verver - Thanks to Cliff Lawson

By Hide

"Naval Ordnance Test Station (NOTS) researchers were developing two TIARA devices for air-to-ground marking. One was the EX 60, a modified Zuni rocket warhead, designed for use with all fixed-wing tactical aircraft, and the other was Marceye, a chemiluminescent-filled 100-pound general-purpose bomb restricted to propeller-driven aircraft. The EX 60 provided sufficient light for strike aircraft to deliver ordnance on a target for 5 minutes; Marceye lasted about 50 percent longer." (Excerpt from *The Station Comes of Age, History of the Navy at China Lake, CA, Volume 4*, by Cliff Lawson.)

Lawson also explained that TIARA was part of China Lake's broader program in chemiluminescence. "It was described as a fluid chemiluminescence material suitable for packaging in a variety of forms. Upon exposure to air during periods of darkness, the material exhibits a strong luminescence, which is capable of illumination of an intensity much brighter than moonlight. It will readily adhere to most surfaces and remain visible on dry surfaces for periods of 30 to 45 minutes and on wet surfaces for periods of ten days."

Lawson also provided that "China Lake also packaged this material in a variety of additional ways: hand grenades, rifle grenades, 81-mm mortar rounds, land mines, and marking sticks. The nice thing about the Vietnam War, from China Lake's point of view, was that operational evaluation was accomplished by sending items to "Nam" to see how they worked in actual combat conditions. As far as I can tell, the TIARA formulation was never fully weaponized. There were problems with deterioration of packaging materials, and some preliminary testing also indicated a toxicity issue."

However, one Vietnam testing report remained from the program in which... "A number of SEALs were ambushed while on patrol at night in enemy territory, completely surrounded and in an extremely hazardous position. By radio, they contacted close air support in the form of Sea Wolf helicopters, which were the Navy version of the UH-1B helicopter and which was equipped with M-60 machine guns



and rockets. The SEALs identified their position, by throwing TIARA grenades out on each of their flanks and the Sea Wolves immediately provided fire support against the enemy. A very strange thing happened, following the burst of the two TIARA grenades in that the enemy immediately directed their weapons fire at the two light patterns produced by the TIARA material on the ground and on the foliage. Evidently, the Viet Cong were surprised by this phenomenon, not having seen it before and being somewhat superstitious, recognized it as some sort of a threat and expended a great amount of their fire power just at these glowing patterns. Because of the diversion of enemy fire, the SEALs were able to escape this ambush and suffered no casualties whatsoever. We got glowing feedback on that particular action from the SEALs involved, who, to this day, claim that those TIARA grenades saved their lives."

China Lake for Dummies – More from Lawson

Marceye is not an acronym. Like the other Eye series names, it is a portmanteau that combines the function of the device with the word eye. Marceye was a marker round that used an improved version of tetrakis (dimethylamino) ethylene (TMAE), which was one of the ingredients used in TIARA. Others in the Eye series include Walleye, Briteye, Snakeye, Rockeye, Bigeye, Gladeye, and more.

The Eye series came from Frank Spangenberg, an engineer in BuOrd who funded a China Lake study for a series of new non-nuclear air-launched weapons around 1959. Spangenberg liked the product line that the China Lakers proposed. "He said that if he put the weapons in individually, they would be deemed too small to include (in the budget - ed) so he put them in as a family, with the 'Eye' name identifying them as a group. He made up all the names" (Email from Lillian Regelson, 2008). Regelson was head of the Systems Research Branch in 1956 and later joined Code 12, the Weapons Planning Group. She was one of the early women to be recognized for her technical skills at China Lake; in 1963, she and Dr. Marguerite (Peggy) Rogers, later a Department Head, were nominated for the Federal Woman's Award.



The A4D's 30,000# Competitor

DOUGLAS

Tommy H. Thomason
14 February 2024

CHANCE
VOUGHT

All true Skyhawk enthusiasts know its origin story: In early 1952 Ed Heinemann proposed a carrier-based jet bomber that weighed only 12,000# (subsequently increased to 14,600# by a switch from gasoline to JP fuel and an increase in bomb weight to 2,000#) to BuAer, which had reportedly estimated that an airplane for the mission would weigh 30,000#.

He achieved that goal in part by innovations such as consolidating all the CNI (Communications Navigation Identification – Ed) avionics and power supplies into one unit and challenging designers to reduce the weight of other off-the-shelf components like the air-conditioner and ejection seat. However, a major contributor to achieving such a dramatic reduction in weight was simply leaving stuff out. Although it may not have been the 30,000# airplane that he referenced in his autobiography, the Vought A2U closely resembled it with respect to both weight and strict adherence to BuAer's requirements.

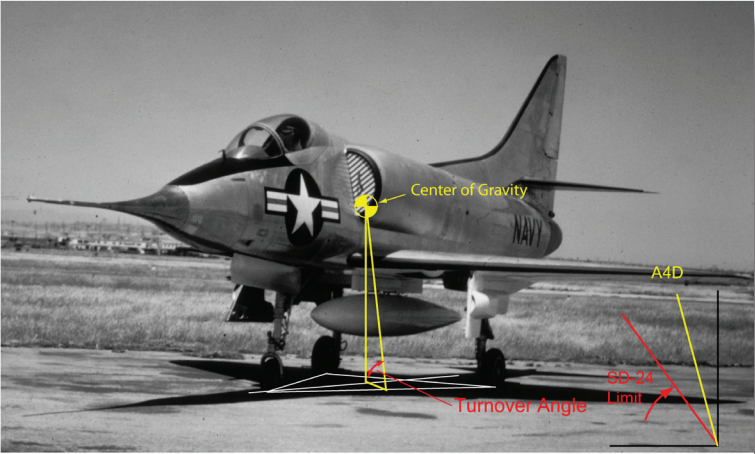
The A2U was a modification of Vought's F7U-3 Cutlass tailored to the jet attack requirement that BuAer was contemplating the early 1950s. It combined the cruise speed of jets desired for the nuclear strike mission with the AD Skyraider's payload capability. Doubtless aware of the forthcoming contract with Douglas for the A4D, Vought presented an unsolicited proposal for an A2U program to BuAer in June 1952, the same month as Douglas received it. As a result, Vought received a letter of intent for 50 A2Us in December 1952.

A comparison of their specification differences:

	A4D	A2U
Engines	One	Two
Afterburning	No	Yes
Flight Control Hydraulics	One pump, manual backup	Four pumps
Electrical System	One AC	One AC, Two DC
VHF Navigation	External store	Yes
Battery	No	Yes
Turnover Angle Specification	Ignored	Met
Leading edge slats extension	Aerodynamic	Hydraulic power
Load Factor (combat weight)	5.9	7.2
Stores Pylons	Three	Seven
20 mm Cannon	Two	Two
Maximum external load (lbs)	5,000	7,000
Ammo (rounds)	200	360
Armor protection (lbs)	50	200
Engine start	Pneumatic GSE	Electrical
Self-boarding	No	Yes
Nose-gear Steering	No	Yes
Emergency Gear extension	Gravity	Pneumatic
Wing Folding	No	Yes

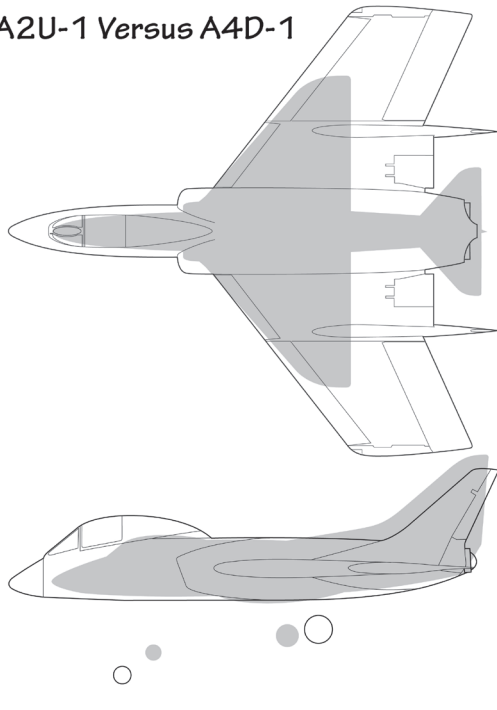
Some of the A4D's would not have been compliant with a BuAer request for proposal, such as the turnover angle, load factor, and self-boarding. Nevertheless, Heinemann had the support of the responsible BuAer Class Desk Officer, who was backed up by the Chief of the Bureau.

The XA4D first flew in June 1954 the first production A4D-1, in August. The first A2U was still a month or so away from first flight in November 1954 when the program was cancelled, in part due to qualification delays with its uprated Westinghouse J46 engine...



A4D Turnover Angle

A2U-1 Versus A4D-1



A4D-2 VA-22 Midway Nov 60 -1



A4D-1 Tico 22 Aug 57 J Sickel VA-93



A4D-2 VA-22 Midway Nov 60- 2



US NAVY FIGHTER WEAPONS SCHOOL 1973

By Lt/Col Ed “Fast Eddie” Cobleigh, USAF (Ret)

Slowly, light dawned over desks scattered in offices throughout the Pentagon and at the headquarters of the USAF Tactical Air Command, TAC. Tactical thinkers of the USAF and of the USN began to realize that learning air combat maneuvering by pitting F-4s against F-4s was no way to learn how to fight very dissimilar aircraft such as MiGs. Our kill ratio in the Vietnam War’s later stages suffered for a lack of realistic training. Men were dying because they didn’t know what they were doing. The brass was under pressure to do something about it.

The Navy got there first. They established a unit, the US Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) at Miramar Naval Air Station just north of San Diego, CA. The mini-squadron was comprised of the best air-to-air jocks available. The headliners were, of course, LT Randy “Duke” Cunningham and his RIO, LT Willie “Irish” Driscoll. These two crewmates shot down five Mig-17s with Sidewinders over North Vietnam, the first American jet aces since the Korean War.

Early in the year, I returned from a three-month staff college in Alabama, Squadron Officers School, where I learned cursive writing. The school was classroom training only, no flying. After two re-qual flights in the F-4, the USAF Fighter Weapons School sent me to the Navy counterpart. Great, I’d flown a grand total of two sorties in three months. Now I’m going up against an ace and guys who live and breathe air combat daily. Before leaving for Alabama, I transferred to the air-to-air flight at the USAF FWS as an IP. I was supposed to bring back the inside scoop on what the Navy was doing right if anything.

To simulate MiG-17s, the Navy took a few A-4 Skyhawks stripping them of all items not needed for air combat. With no nose wheel steering, no radars, no guns, no drop tanks, no gunsights, and mounting the largest jet engine that would fit, the J-52/ P-408,

the A-4 “Mongoose” aircraft were the hottest A-4s ever flown. The leading-edge slats on the wings were bolted up and locked for easier handling at the cost of a higher landing speed. The jets were an air-frame, engine, and radio, nothing else. I attended A-4 ground school for a week at El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, CA. Then I got a five-hop check out in the two-seat TA-4J at Miramar. The plan was to go through the USN FWS course as an adversary pilot flying the A-4.

For some reason, I hit it off with “Duke” Cunningham. He volunteered to check me out in air-to-air combat in the A-4. The Mongoose was fun to fly, simple, honest, straightforward, and boasted of a superior thrust-to-weight ratio. It turned well and accelerated strongly until about .9 Mach when it ran into a wall of compressibility. Visibility from the cockpit was good, better than the F-4, once you actually got into the cockpit. It wasn’t as tight as the F-104 I flew but it was close. Cunningham’s lessons consisted of a formation take-off and climb out to the practice area over the Pacific. We’d turn 90 degrees away from each other then turn back in -- fight’s on!

This was the first time I flew a single-engine jet airplane and over the ocean at that. It was a little unnerving, but I soon got used to it. At least I didn’t have to try landing it on a boat. Duke and I enjoyed some epic air battles with very few “kill” calls, although I must admit I did seek refuge in the sun a few times to negate a simulated heat-seeking sidewinder shot.

On my last checkout sortie, I was determined to do well, to shine my ass. I noticed USN formation takeoffs tended to be in the “same way, same day” category. I made up my mind to



Cobleigh & RAF Jaguar 2018

show all the jocks at Miramar, of which there were legions, how the USAF does formation flying. I tucked my jet in tight with Duke’s A-4, not quite overlapping wing tips, keeping it there until we were airborne and clear of the field. When I had a spare second, I retracted the landing gear.

On the climb out I couldn’t keep up with Cunningham. I started to lag behind him. The A-4 has no afterburner, so that remedy was unavailable. I looked down to check the engine gages and saw one main landing gear still extended, the other main and the nose gear were up and locked. The maximum gear down speed in the A-4 is 225. The airspeed indicator read 275 KIAS. In flying tight formation, I had neglected the gear, trying to retract it above max speed, now one main was hung. I called Randy. He confirmed the sorry situation. He told me to slow down, put the gear handle down and see what happens. All three gear came down and

TOP GUN, an Outfit with no Guns

locked, with three green lights burning bright. That was enough for me to call it a day after over-speeding the gear by 50 KIAS. However, my flight leader told me to suck up the gear and let’s go fight. Despite my misgivings, that’s just what we did.

When we almost reached minimum fuel to get home, I told Duke I’d really like to see if the landing gear was OK, so he reluctantly led us back to Miramar. I got three green lights in the traffic pattern and asked Duke to visually check out the gear. That was a mistake. The control tower heard that and asked if we had gear problems. I said, “I’m not sure.” That was another mistake. The tower, it must have been a slow day up there, declared an emergency, rolled the fire trucks and an ambulance, telling me to hold off trying to land until they scrambled an LSO out to the end of the runway. BFD!

The LSO, Landing Signals Officer, is a guy who stands on a platform on the side of an aircraft carrier, even with the touchdown zone. He controls the final approach path and coaches the pilots trying to land. He can wave off an unsafe approach. He also grades every landing. During WWII, the LSO wielded brightly colored ping-pong paddles used to signal a pilot to bank left, bank right, go around, or press on, then cut the power to touch down. In that era, the LSO was very important, those piston-engined fighters had poor visibility over the nose during landing. The long nose stuck up in the air at slow airspeeds.

Also, this was before the angled deck carrier. Then, once you were committed to touch down, you had to land, no touch and goes. If your tailhook missed grabbing a cable stretched across the deck, you ended up in a barrier which resembled the net on a tennis court, only higher, much stronger, and procured by the US Government. Nowadays with angled decks if you miss a cable, you just go around and try again. The angled deck also allows

touch and go training as well. In the USN, being an LSO is a career path, some pilots specialize in LSO-ing.

As an aside, the Royal Navy (RN), who at that time flew the same aircraft as the USN, the F-4K Phantoms, albeit with different engines, dispensed with the LSO position years ago. The Brits fly a circular pattern instead of the USN’s straight-in final approach. In a tight left turn, they can keep the touchdown zone in close sight, rolling wings level just in time to touch down on their much smaller carriers. The USN thinks LSOs are essential for flying safety, the RN thinks they are a waste of time. The USAF, including yours truly, didn’t give a damn.

I saw no benefit of having an LSO watch me land. What could he, on the ground, see that my wingman couldn’t? I told the tower I was low on fuel. I was going to attempt a death-defying landing even if the LSO hadn’t yet made the scene at the end of the runway. I landed without incident and without an LSO.

Once I checked out as an adversary pilot, I flew against fleet guys in their F-4s. In a two-versus-four hassle, another TOPGUN guy and I were fighting four student F-4s. I achieved a guns-tracking solution on one student and was about to call a “kill.” Before I could press the mike button, I saw large pieces separate from the F-4, shiny sheets of metal that that fluttered, tumbled, and headed down to the Pacific Ocean. My first thought was, “Yikes! That’s realistic training.” Then, “Did I do that?”

The Phantom’s horizontal stabilizers, one on each side of the tail, angled down. Each was made up of two segments. The inboard panels were of aluminum, the outboard halves, closest to the hot jet engine exhaust, were of heat-resistant stainless steel. Where the two halves joined, steel was bolted directly to aluminum. When two dissimilar metals are joined, electrolysis corrosion can occur, particularly in a salty, humid environment as onboard an aircraft carrier. The F-4 pilot, call sign “Jungle

Jim,” for his ripped muscles, tried to spoil my tracking solution by yanking a ton of Gs. The corroded joints failed and both stab tips left the aircraft. It was my one and only simulated gun kill.

The Navy jock returned to Miramar, landing very hot. With half of his stabs gone, he couldn’t control the aircraft at high AOA and slow speeds. He touched down at 180 KIAS. His tailhook picked up the midfield cable yanking the aircraft to a complete stop. No sweat.

On one sortie, The Leader of TOPGUN, Lt/Commander, later Admiral, Ron “Mugs” Mckeown and I were scheduled for air combat training with a flight of two F-8 Crusaders of the USN Naval Reserve unit based at Miramar. The reserve pilots were everyday civilians, usually airline pilots, who reported for a few days duty, perhaps seven or ten sorties a month to fly the F-8. The Crusader was being phased out of the active-duty navy. Eventually, they could “get on regular” and draw pay for their reserve stints, but that status wasn’t assured. I always said I got paid for being in the USAF, for enduring the haircuts, the marching, the constant moves, the discipline. The flying I did for free. The USN Crusader guys proved me right.

When the practice fight began, those airline pilots turned Mugs and I every which way but loose. They were really, really good. The F-8 earned the title, “MiG Master” for having the best kill ratio of any aircraft in SEA and I saw why. The whole engagement took place beneath a 1800-foot overcast out over the Pacific. Trying to shake an opponent, I managed to enter the cloud deck inverted. The natural tendency was to pull the nose down and to try to fly out of the clouds. But that was a good way to make a big, one-time only splash. I rolled the A-4 wings level on the gages and set up a gentle descent back to the visual world. When I emerged from the overcast, the F-8 was still right behind me, only closer.

continued...

The crafty Crusader driver knew what I would do and waited for me to appear again at his 12 O'clock.

The Navy called the F-8 "The Last of the Gunfighters" as its primary weapon was four 20mm cannons. The Crusader also wielded Sidewinder missiles when out of gun range.

All Phantoms of that era wielded two air-to-air missiles: the short-range, heat-seeking AIM-9 Sidewinder for within visual range fights and the medium-range, radar-guided AIM-7 Sparrow. Both were developed by the US Navy.

For reasons best known to themselves, the Navy jocks focused on close-in combat with Sidewinders. Their F-4 aircraft never employed guns despite calling their FWS "TOPGUN." I suspected "TOP MISSILE" lacked panache. When the USN FWS began operations, attendance by fleet jocks was low. No one knew what the school was for. Its original name was a dull bureaucratic moniker and few volunteered to attend. The commander at the time changed the name to TOPGUN and guys lined up trying to get in. It's all about the branding, Baby! By the time I got there, the school was famous for expert Sidewinder employment tactics.

Randy Cunningham was an expert at this twisting, turning, climbing, diving, high-G environment. All his five MiG kills were with Sidewinders against

MiG-17s. That's what the USN did and that's what they primarily taught at TOPGUN. Sparrow employment was an afterthought both in the classroom and in the air.

Shortly after Duke Cunningham returned to the States, USAF Captain Steve Ritchie and two WSO/RIOs, Lt. Jeffery Feinstein and Lt. Chuck Bellevue, became MiG aces. All Ritchie's five kills were with the Sparrow against the more advanced MiG-21. Go figure.

At TOPGUN, I overheard Cunningham in conversation with another instructor. I think it was Winston Copeland. They had a contest going to see who could do a split S at the lowest altitude in the A-4M. Duke said he did one starting at 2000 feet over the ocean. The next step was 1900 feet, then 1800. There were only two ways this contest would end; someone would scare themselves so badly by barely missing the wavetops that he would withdraw. Or someone would hit the water. I thought to myself that this game was idiotic, risking it all for empty bragging rights.

Later the TOPGUN school acquired aircraft capable of simulating more advanced MiGs; the F-5 Freedom Fighter and the F-16N Viper.

Having learned all I could stand from the US Navy, I returned to Nellis AFB hell-bent on improving our own training.

Author's Bio

Lt/Col Ed "Fast Eddie" Cobleigh earned his pilot's wings with the United States Air Force, flying the

F-104 Starfighter, the F-4 Phantom, the A-4 Skyhawk, the Anglo-French Jaguar, and the F-16 Viper aircraft.

He was a weapons and tactics Instructor Pilot with the USAF Fighter Weapons School, the US Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN), and the Royal Air Force Qualified Weapons Instructor (QWI) course. He has flown with the US Air Force, US Navy, the Royal Air Force, the Imperial Iranian Air Force, and the French Air Force.

Lt/Col Cobleigh also served as an Air Intelligence Officer, working with the CIA, FBI, and MI6 on a variety of covert intelligence projects.

Ed's aviation adventure books have sold over 40,000 copies in 12 countries, four genres and three languages. Two of his books were Amazon #1 bestsellers.



Navy Fighter Weapons School, A-4E 150023, circa 1980, NAS Miramar. Credit Robert L. Lawson.

Luck of the Irish

A young Irishman was scheduled for his Fam 3 hop which was uneventful. He finished up with a simulated flameout approach from 13,000 feet and a wave off at 500 feet. The pilot then entered the pattern downwind for touch-and-go's. At the 90 deg. position at 400 feet and 125 knots at 80% power, he felt a distinct and sudden slowing and sinking of the aircraft. A quick glance showed the engine dropping to idle and he immediately advanced the throttle, with no results. His first impulse was to eject, but remembered his low altitude. He called MAYDAY, leveled the wings, dropped the nose and went in gear down into a clear area. On initial impact the ejection seat rollers were ripped off, the seat rocked forward, the pilot struck his chin on the stick, and then rocked back. Just as the seat hit the upright position the pilot ejected while the plane was still skidding. Since the seat had been torn off the track only partial ejection force was applied. The pilot and seat rose 15-20 feet, made one complete somersault and landed on the seat pan 50 feet forward of the aircraft. Owing to a faulty assembly job, the automatic lap belt release mechanism didn't fire, and the pilot remained tightly strapped in his seat. He unstrapped and walked away with minor cuts and bruises although the initial impact was estimated to be in excess of 40 G's.

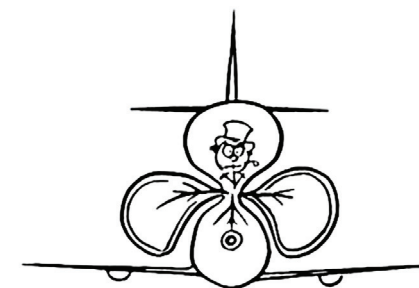
From the files of Gary Verver

Grampaw Pettibone



Great horned toadies! This was the mostest! This young man came out of an almost impossible situation smellin' like a rose. He never remembered pulling the curtain, so obviously it was a reflex action he made while dazed from the +40G impact. If he hadn't ejected, he'd have made it anyway, though, because the plane retained its cockpit integrity. In this instance, the "Murphied" automatic lap belt release undoubtedly saved the pilot's life, BUT, he flew the whole hop booby trapped for a normal ejection. The safety and survival equipment officer better get right on the ball in this outfit and make doggone certain his men are properly checked out, 'cause he's holding an awfully big sack in his hand right now.

In the maintenance and care of aviation safety equipment, there is no such thing as an excusable error.



Remember! All A4Ds don't resemble four leaf clover!

FROM THE ATTIC



Kneeboard Nav Card Jack Woodul

This is a VA-86 kneeboard card for a 2400 launch, 0130 recovery night mission with applicable nav and tactical data. Skip Wood was lead with YP as wingie. Felt tip pens had just been invented and got used for better vis in the red cockpit lighting. Makes me Hort go pittypat just to remember getting spooled up for the night recovery.

BTN: 718 308.2 918 17					
A/C	PILOT	RKT	SWUNDER	2400 / 0130	
461	Wood	I	22	EPR	ALT 02 OHV
474	Woodal	II	070	330 / 20 / 15	
461	EAC	EFB	240 / 25 / 10	0143 / 06	
T 78		TWIT MAR 271.6			
S. POSIT		1645 / 108 47			
IFF/SIF		I III 84 I III I III			
DIVERT	CUT	NAV	AFC	WX	ALT/SL
Danawg		37	363.8		FUEL
Ne13X			105/66		
			105/36		
"Bonecrusher" 25 9		CH			
"Black Velvet" 21 5		12 T			
"Snake Skin" Charlie Red		1757 0			
SKYLARK - MIG		10632			
298/150 mi. VINH SON		0100 0			
ON TOP + 5 mi		81260			
Palmetto 341.0		115 MILS			

Puresome Unplugged



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

A Memorial Day Tribute

by Jack Woodul -- from many years ago

To the Brethren,

In small moments, the War always came back to him. He never remembered his minor triumphs, but frabb-ups were always sneaking up out of his subconscious, tapping him on the shoulder, saying "Remember me?" The Ghosts of his flying career also occasionally emerged from their smoking holes in the ground and their fireballs in the sky to visit, though over the years, they had largely merged with the spirits that haunted the skies over Schweinfurt, stilled the air over Gettysburg and sounded distant trumpets over the lonely white markers on the hills above the Little Big Horn...

---The Shrill of the Bagpipe, the Roll of the Drum

Puresome did all the usual stuff...turned in his DD-175 to the Ops guys. Then, as he was leaving for the transient line, Puresome noticed the plaques. The sun was streaming through the windows and dust motes were dancing in the light. On the wall were posted the names of all the guys from Lemoore who had been bagged in the war. There were lots of names.

Time stopped in Puresome's universe as he read the names. ...some he knew, most he didn't. Puresome felt them, what they had done, and what he had not. He felt the honor in them and the sadness of a ratsass cause. "You don't forget us, you don't forget us," the wall whispered, "We gave and we're gone and nobody gives a shit, so don't forget us." Puresome started as two loudly talking sailors came around the corner. He walked on out of operations towards his plane.

On the flight home, and on other flights, and through the years, Puresome could hear the ghosts, and the bright fire in him burned, and he did not forget them.

God bless!



TAPS notices may be sent to
Dave Dollarhide

• davedollarhide@msn.com •



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

Dr. Allan Adeeb, 6 April 2024, Jacksonville, FL
Lowell E Austin, June 2021, Redmond, WA
Ed Baker, 4 March 2024, Melbourne, FL
Bill "Spike" Boese, 10 April 2024, Milford, IA
Ray "Notso" Bright, 8 February 2024, San Clemente, CA
"Wild" Bill Conley, 10 March 2024, Boston, MA
Tim "Wiz" Dineen, 31 March 2024, Mission Viejo, CA
Jack Hales, 27 June 2023, St Petersburg, FL
Ken "Hayes Man" Hayes, 19 April, 2024, Marietta, GA
MGen Denny "Jersey" Krupp, 5 Dec 2023, Chesapeake, VA
Dick Lawe, 15 Mar 2023, Vista, CA
Doug "Oly" Olson, 6 January 2024
Paul "Pew" Mcmillan, December 2022, Fairfield, CT
Homer Palmateer, 21 January 2024, Chesapeake, VA
WJ "Bill" Parsons, 29 August 2023, Kalispell, MT
Ray Rauenhorst, 19 April 2024, Easton, MN
Bill Strickland, December 2018, Burr Ridge, IL
John Wilcox, 31 August, 2022, Tampa, FL



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Spring-2024 • Journal

Volume 30 • Number 2



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