

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 31-1



Paul Wood



T.R. Swartz

Contents:

Recognition of CDR Hank Strong

The Need for Speed, The U.S. Navy's Transition to Jets

The Air Barons and the A-4 Demo

Attack Squadron Forty-Four

Spring BOD

Wyndham Hotel by USS Midway
15 April, 0830

Spring 2025

<https://skyhawk.org>



FINAL THOUGHTS FROM HIDE

Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

ALMOST RELIEVED BY IRISH

It's almost official! Mat "Irish" Garretson will relieve me as Editor of the *A-4Ever Skyhawk Journal*, after this issue is published. Irish has been very active with the A-7 Association over the years, and he's up for this new opportunity.

To review the short list, Irish is a private pilot and has lots of years in the Atlanta Reserves with VA-205. He's Print Historian for the Blue Angels Association, publishing books

about the team, as well as books about the A-7 and other military aircraft.

Irish will need your help with A-4 and related stories that stir up memories, to also include tales like A-1 Spads in Vietnam, or historic "sea stories" that led up to the A-4 era. I know he's excited



Mat "Irish" Garretson

about the opportunities he'll get to learn about the "Scooter" and its people. You can contact Irish at: friendsofnavair.com

THANKS!

Thanks to all who have helped with the Journal over the years. Many times, along the way, I would worry about where the next article, TINS, TRIVIA, From-The-Attic, etc. would come from, but it always worked out, usually because members and others would appear with an item just right for publishing.

I would attempt to list the many people who helped, but don't want to take a chance on missing a name. However, I will again single out Doug Bohs as head and shoulders above others. Doug had never done this kind of writing before, but



Doug Bohs



Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

during his years aboard USS *Midway*, as an AQ2, he'd seen, or heard "scuttlebutt" accidents, but years later, never knew any of the explanations, leaving him in the dark. Years later, in his old age, he began digging for answers, on the internet, which led to finding people involved in the stories and mostly used the phone to dig out the stories. That led to answers to accidents and later, pertinent history about Naval Aviation that have been read by all of you reading this issue. Thanks again, Doug!

Hide

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IN MEMORY OF
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(1939-2007)
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BOMBS AWAY!

• Spring 2025 •

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Contributions

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

On the Cover: On May 1, 1967, LCDR TR Swartz, while flying VA-76 A-4C, 148609, shot down a MiG-17 during the Vietnam War, with an unguided Zuni rocket over Vietnam. The Warbird Heritage Foundation owns and flies the only airworthy A-4B Skyhawk in the world, BUNO 142112. In tribute to "TR's" heroic event, the airplane is painted in the correct colors from the 1967 battle. In this photo, its being flown by Paul Wood, owner of the Foundation.



TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net



■ From: John "Bear" Hildebrandt Subject: 17 Wacky Naval Aviation Terms You Never Knew You Wanted To Know

"Ease Guns to Land" - As soon as carrier pilots hit the landing area, the engines are at full military power (full power without afterburner). This is because in case the hook misses one of the wires, the plane has enough power to take off and continue flying. Ease Guns To Land is when a pilot pulls the throttles back in an effort to help set the hook for arrestment. This is a big no-no and results in a stern debrief and probably a mandatory break from flying.

"Taxi One Wire" - Written as "T1W": The ship has four arresting cables (CVN's Reagan, Bush and Ford only have three), with the most aft wire being #1 and the most forward wire being #4. The target wire (what every pilot is trying to hit) is normally #3. While catching any wire can be considered "good," you want to avoid the #1 wire because it is the closest to the back of the ship. Hitting the back of the ship is not recommended. Taking that thought a step further, pilot's who land well before the #1 wire and "taxi into it" are on a very dangerous path.

"Tower Flower" - During the launch and recovery of aircraft, each squadron has to send a Junior Officer (JO) up to the tower (called Pri-Fly, short for Primary Flight Control) to provide the Air Boss and his team with a liaison for their aircraft and any problems (or stupidity) that may arise. Unfortunately for the JO, the Air Boss is not always in the greatest of moods, so communication tends to flow in only one direction. The poor soul on the receiving end of the Air Boss's wrath is the Tower Flower.

"Greenie Board" - Each pass at the carrier is graded by Landing Signal Officers (LSO's). The results for each pilot are displayed using colored dots on a "greenie board" displayed in their respective ready rooms for all to see. The green color represents the highest grade a pilot can receive. A fair is normally yellow and considered an average pass. Red represents the worst and is referred to as a "cut pass" (such as ease guns to land). A brown dot is used for a pass called a "no grade." This pass is considered safe but certainly below average and affectionately known as a turd. A rule to live by: Avoid the brown.

"Foc'sle Follies" - At the end of each grading period for landings (called a Line Period), the awards for Top Hook and other accomplishments are handed out during Foc'sle Follies. The name comes from the location on the ship where this ceremony takes place (Ships Foc'sle) and where crazy, funny, and sometimes straddling the line of political correctness skits are performed. It is a great camaraderie building event and normally happens before a port call or just prior to the end of a long cruise, so spirits are high.

"Roll 'em" - A Roll 'em is a term used for showing a movie in a squadron's Ready Room. Roll 'ems can be very formal events with set doctrine and mandatory attendance. The events might include a **"Call Sign Review Board,"** where a new guy is formally blessed with a call sign, a **"Stoning"** is where someone is brought before the crowd and stoned with paper rocks for performing a mildly dumb act that day, and an attempt to guess the movie about to be shown using drawings of the movie subject matter kind of like

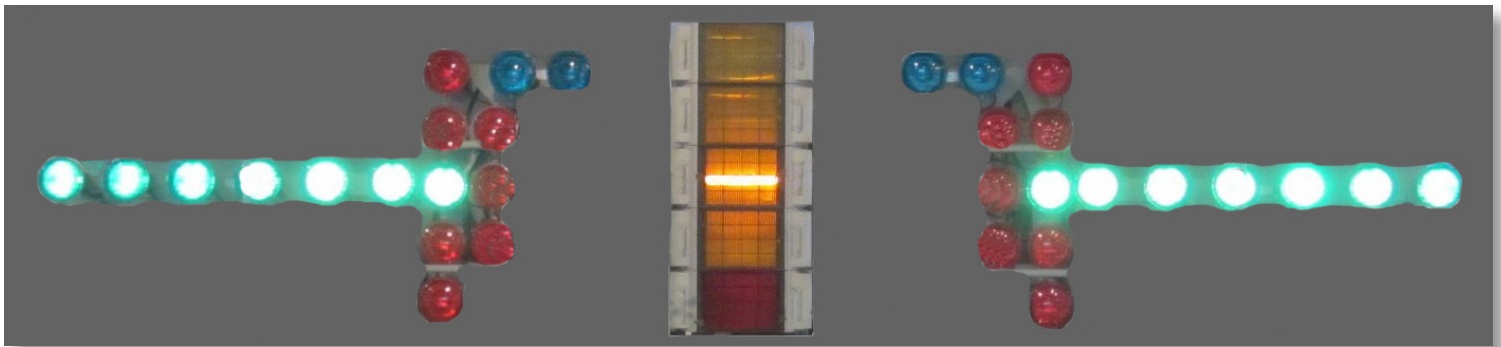
charades. Roll 'ems include popcorn, sodas, and as much candy as can be purchased from the ship's store.

"Mid Rats" - Formally known as Midnight Rations, it's one of four meals served on the ship and one of the most popular because the grill is open for orders. If you are a nightly attendee to Mid Rats, you better have a good workout program in place to keep the extra pounds off.

"Mr. Hands" - The ship has closed circuit television that is piped through to nearly every space that has a TV. Two of the most watched channels at night are the PLAT camera (**Pilots Landing Aide Television or PLAT**), which shows landings from the perspective of looking aft on the ship and the Mr. Hands channel. Mr. Hands is a real time depiction of traffic in the pattern using small pucks symbolizing aircraft that move around a board. It gets its name from the sailor's hand (sometimes in white gloves) that would pick up the pucks and move them around, placing them at the proper location as aircraft made it around the pattern. Mr. Hands has now been upgraded to a video depiction rather than someone's actual hand, but old-timers still refer to it as Mr. Hands.

"Dog Machine" - If you've ever been to a Golden Corral or similar restaurant where they have soft serve ice cream, then you've seen a dog machine. Soft serve ice cream is known on the ship as "dog" because when it comes out of the machine it has a strong physical resemblance to dog poop. In the wardroom, pilots always know if there is a good batch of dog. If you hear someone exclaim, "That's a good dog!" a rush to the dog machine ensues. I guess pilots don't have much to do.

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



“Smoking Lamp is Lit” - This old Navy tradition is slowly fading away as the Navy encourages people to quit using tobacco. While there is no actual lamp, there are announcements made on the 1 MC establishing when folks can go smoke. The smoking lamp is out during refueling, drills, and ordnance loading. Kind of makes sense, I guess.

“Six Pack” - With more than six acres of usable space, the flight deck is divided into different sections with nicknames so people can figure out where your aircraft is parked. One of the most well known areas is the “six pack,” which can hold roughly six jets and is located just in front of the island. Tomcats were always parked on the fantail. In the later years of the Tomcat, that area was referred to as “Jurassic Park.”

“Covey Launch” - To help two aircraft expeditiously rendezvous sometimes the deck will perform what is called a “covey launch.” This is when two aircraft go down the catapults at the same time, typically catapults #1 and #3. It is a well-timed and coordinated event usually performed by a seasoned air department deck crew. Plus, it looks pretty cool!

“Mark Your Father” - This is a term used by aircrew and controllers to identify where an aircraft is in relation to the carrier using a radial and distance from the ship’s TACAN. It is normally an imperative statement and goes something

like this Controller: “101, mark your Father” (In his best Darth Vader voice) Pilot: “101, marking mom’s 230 for 25” (i.e. Southeast of the ship at 25 nautical miles). The verbiage “marking mom’s XXX” is used to clarify the direction as “from the ship to the aircraft” and avoids having the reciprocal direction being interpreted as the positional, albeit incorrectly. (The reciprocal would be “Mom bears 050 for 25” but then it just gets confusing and we try to keep directions to one way)

“Clara” - One of the first times coming down the chute at the ship, my pilot told me he was Clara.” I had no idea what he was saying, so I quizzically asked him over the aircraft’s internal intercom system “Clara who?” Clara is the term pilot’s use to tell the Landing Signal Officers that they cannot see the ball (the Fresnel lens landing aide). Clara is short for “clarification” or more bluntly “tell me where I am on glideslope, I can’t see the ball.” The LSO’s response after Clara is normally a position call. “Roger, you’re high.” In my case, the “Clara who” back to my pilot did not help our situation; he still had no idea where we were on glideslope and the LSO’s had no idea he was “Clara.”

“Bolter” - This is one of the most well-known naval aviation terms. If a pass is made at the ship and the aircraft’s hook does not engage an arresting wire (typically because of being too high), then it is known as a bolter. If the hook

touches in the landing area but fails to catch a wire (several things could be a factor for this happening), it is known as a hook skip bolter. A hook skip bolter is shown on the event status board as a “B” with a circle around it, where as a bolter is simply shown as a “B.”

“Bingo on the Ball” - aka “Trick or Treat”: During flying operations when there is a usable divert field within 200 nautical miles, the carrier is under what is called “Bingo Ops.” This means if an aircraft has a problem or is low on gas and cannot make an arrested landing, the pilot can divert—or bingo—to land at the divert field. When a pilot calls “Bingo on the Ball” (or “Trick or Treat”), it means this is his last pass before he has to bingo back to the pre-determined divert field. The aircraft shows up on the event status board as “BOB.” BOB always makes you nervous because you don’t want an aircraft to head back to the beach unintentionally.

“Red Light” - Each carrier has a Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter that launches first before any other aircraft. This is in case an aircraft does go down, a rescue helicopter is in place to pick up the pilot. Before launching, the SAR helo gives a report on how long it can stay airborne and still perform the search and rescue mission. This is known as red light, and is normally given in hours and minutes: 610’s red light, 3+15.” Thus, 610 has 3 hours and 15 minutes where he can be SAR capable. Let’s hope he doesn’t have to use it.

Recognition of CDR Hank Strong Long Overdue

By Terry Wolf

On May 25, 1972, CDR “Hank” Strong, CO of VA-212, was leading a twelve-plane strike group of Air Wing 21 A-4F aircraft against the Ben Thuy road bridge 3 miles south of Vinh, North Vietnam.

Upon roll-in, the integrity of the strike formation was quickly compromised as they took intense, accurate fire from all possible calibers of AAA. LT Rob Barber, in the second division, took a hit that turned his centerline drop-tank into a fire ball.

CDR Strong’s wingman was separated from the formation while dodging another aircraft, while the remainder of the formation tracked and released their MK-82s in what proved to be a very effective strike.

All eyes were on Rob Barber’s aircraft as everyone pulled off toward the water. There were radio calls of, “You’re on fire, eject!” However, since the engine was still running, Rob waited until he was well out over the Gulf, before considering ejecting, which turned out to be long enough for the fire to extinguish. Rob then quickly plugged the duty tanker, wet-winging his way back to the ship.

It wasn’t until the strike group was feet wet that they realized that CDR Strong was not with them. No one had seen his aircraft take a hit or impact the ground and thus CDR Strong was listed as MIA.

Just two months later, on July 9, 1972, CDR Frank Green, XO of VA-212, was lost on a night Road Recce mission when he impacted the ground while attacking a truck near Dam Khanh, 50 miles S of Hanoi. CDR Green was listed as MIA until his remains were recovered in 2008 and eventually returned in 2010.

For many years there has been an A-4B in the San Diego Air and Space Museum, that is painted in VA-212 colors with CDR Green’s name below



CDR Hank Strong

the cockpit. Air Wing 21 members who toured the museum have long appreciated the honor paid to CDR Green and those who knew the back-story wished the appropriate honor could be extended to CDR Strong. On Tuesday, March 19, 2024, a handful of Air Wing 21 aviators met to grant that long overdue honor, participating in the unveiling of the A-4B with both names and appropriate MODEX markings on left and right side of the museum’s A-4B.

This event came about thanks to the kindness and cooperation of Jim Kidrick, Naval Aviator, Attack Pilot, and President and CEO of the San Diego Air and Space Museum, and the relentless energy of John “Smoke” Wilks, VA-164 pilot and member of the strike group on the day that CDR Strong was lost.

The museum was kind enough to provide a video of the proceedings which is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/FXB789bbtA>.

In attendance were many former air wing members, both fighter and attack, including some who were on the strike



RAMPANT RAIDERS
VA-212

that day. Jerry Tucker was flying the F-8 TARCAP, Dick Evert, the F-8 photo escort, John Wilks, a VA-164 flak suppression A-4, Rob Barber, a VA-164 strike aircraft, and Greg Marshall, launched as a spare in a VA-212 A-4, was number 12 aircraft attached to the VA-55 division.

In addition, Air Wing 21 members Denny Irelan, VA-212, Terry Wolf, VA-55, and many friends of the museum and of the A-4 were in attendance to add their support to the ceremony.

After the ceremony, the attendees and members of CDR Strong’s family were able to meet via video conference in the museum’s boardroom for a personal visit and discussion that was a heartfelt time for all. The chance to answer questions from multiple generations of CDR Strong’s family was particularly rewarding. The experience left the author longing for more opportunities to dissect other Alpha Strikes that have long gathered dust in what’s left of his memory.



Hank, Pete, John, Bob and Jack at the 1967 dinner in Japan

1967 - Along the Way With LCDR "Hank" Strong

By "Hide" with consult from Pete "Beast" Taylor

Hank was previously in VA-46, as the Maintenance Officer following the 1967 "Forrestal Fire" disaster that killed 134. Later, five Clansmen pilots were assigned to "ferry" their five remaining airworthy aircraft (*Actually, only one or two of the Skyhawks was fully ready for cross-country flying*). The A-4Es were flown from NAS Cubi Point, PI, to an airport in Japan with an unpronounceable name. The pilots were "Hank" Strong, Pete Taylor, John Donahue, Bob Heyer and Jack O'Hara. They decided that Hank and Bob would fly together, while the rest would become a flight of three. They were destined to have terrible weather. Pete "Beast" Taylor's bird was mechanically unable to fly alone in the "clag," and in one of the two landings required, he was "kissed off" by his leader, Ron Boyle, "only to see, nothing." As Beast told me, "I just tried to do absolutely nothing and suddenly, the runway came into view at 100'."

As stated by author Terry Wolf, when Hank was shot down, it was not known if he was dead, or a POW, so I wore this POW bracelet until the worst was confirmed.



Hide's Hank Strong POW bracelet

THE NEED FOR SPEED

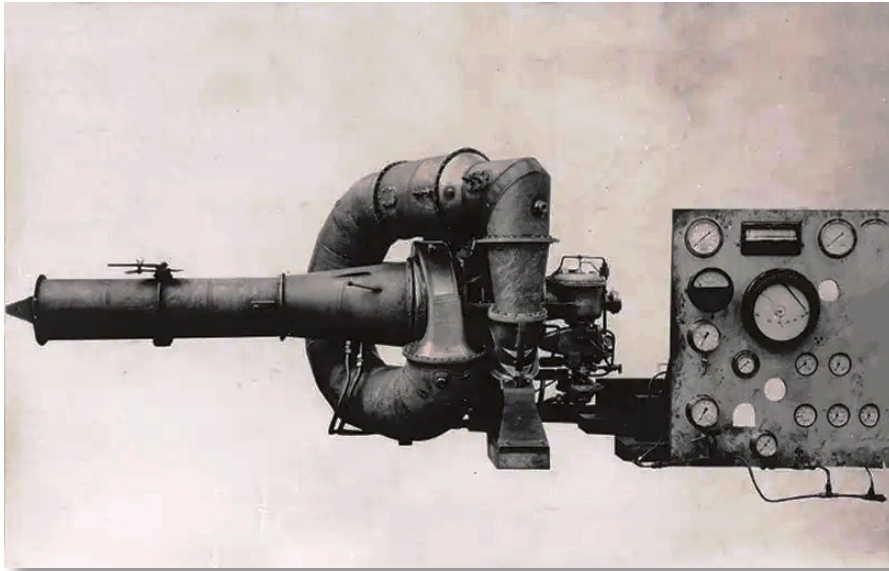
By Doug Bohs

By June of 1942 the entire world had been at war for several months. Due to the advances made in aircraft and aircraft engine technology following the First World War, domination of the skies was becoming an increasingly major factor for all of the major powers. Not unlike the early aviation pioneers who developed the first

operational aircraft, the early pioneers of jet engine development were individuals, not large corporations. Germany, England and Italy each had an individual who was credited with initiating the development of their country's first jet aircraft engine. Japan's development of the jet engine started from drawings and photographs furnished by the German Government and sent to the Japanese Government. As the concept of jet propulsion moved to the development stage funding became an issue. The German, Italian and Japanese governments all funded jet engine and aircraft development in a timely manner prior to and during World War II. The English Air Ministry and the English Government were slow to realize the importance of the jet engine.

On the morning of August 27, 1939, Erich Warstz made the world's first successful flight of a turbojet-powered aircraft, the Heinkel HE 178. The engine was designed by Pabst von Ohain. The aircraft flew from the Rostock-Marienehe aerodrome in the state of Mecklenburg, Germany and was the first flight of a turbo-jet powered aircraft.

On August 27, 1940 a Caproni N-1 aircraft made its first flight from Caproni aircraft facility outside of Milan, Italy. Designed by engineer



Frank Whittle Jet Engine prototype

Secondo Campini, it used a conventional twelve-cylinder gasoline engine (no prop) as a compressor and was also known as a "Motorjet." The aircraft was considered a jet, since it was powered by high-speed exhaust gases.

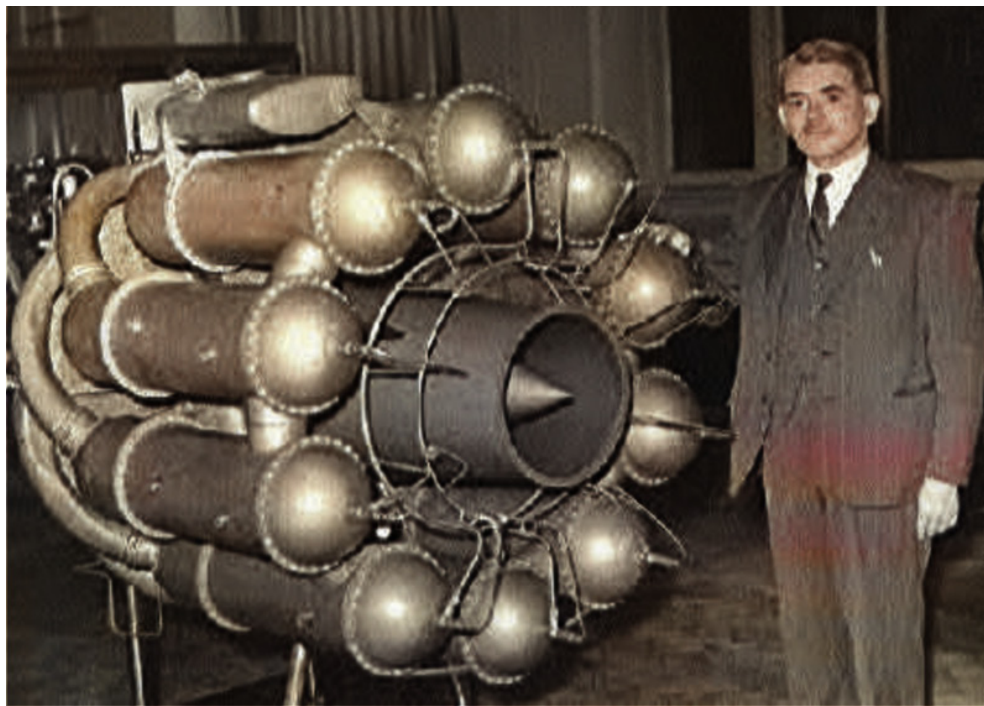
The transition to jet aircraft by the United States Navy cannot be fully appreciated without covering the development of the turbo-jet in England. There was one Englishman whose belief in his idea and dedication to seeing it developed was solely responsible for bringing the United States into the jet age. On the 15th of May 1941, a Gloucester 28/39 made its first successful flight. This was the first flight of a jet-powered aircraft outside of the Axis Powers. The turbo-jet engine, designated the W.1, was invented and designed by Frank Whittle, who also built the prototype practically single-handedly.

Born to a working-class family in 1907, Frank Whittle joined the RAF as an Apprentice Mechanic at the age of 16. After working his way through the system, he qualified as a Flight Officer in 1928. It was then he recognized the limitations of propeller-driven aircraft engines at higher altitudes. Like Pabst von Ohain and Secondo Campini, Whittle also conceived the idea of using a gas turbine to produce jet propulsion to power an aircraft. Working on his

own, he filed for a patent on a turbojet engine in 1930. The British Government did not put his patent on the Secret list, and it was published world-wide in 1932. The RAF was impressed with the idea and sent Whittle to Cambridge University in 1934. He graduated with honors in two years and wrote his thesis on jet propulsion. His ideas were presented to the Air Ministry, but they showed no interest in pursuing his invention. They argued that it would require too

much fuel and the materials required to withstand the heat would not be available. With no support from the Air Ministry or his government, Whittle could not afford to renew his patent, and it expired in 1935. This gave Germany "access" to Whittle's patent four years before the HE 178 made its first flight. As his design developed, funding became an issue. With no hope of governmental funding, Whittle sought private funding. In 1936 Whittle joined with two former RAF pilots and formed Power Jets Ltd., which was initially successful in obtaining limited private funding. British Thomson-Houston (BTH), an engineering and industrial company, was funded by Power Jets and worked with Whittle to develop the first prototype in their facilities in Rugby, England. While the Air Ministry still did not believe his engine would ever have military value, they allowed him time away from his duties to work on his design in his own test cell at BTH. In early 1937, Whittle hired his first full-time employee, and in April of 1937, he conducted the first successful test of his turbojet prototype. Whittle was able to add to his work force in July of 1939, and in September of that same year, England declared war on Germany. Continuing his work and fighting persistent funding issues, he

THE U.S. NAVY'S TRANSITION TO JETS



Frank Whittle Jet Engine prototype

developed a fully functional turbojet, the Whittle W.1X, in 1941.

Rover Ltd. was selected to make the W.1X, but after several false starts, Rover exchanged jet engine production with Rolls-Royce who at the time was making tank engines. Rolls-Royce was able to improve on Whittle's original design and produced the W.1 jet engine. In February of 1940, the Gloster Aircraft Company was granted a contract to develop an aircraft to be powered by the W.1. The aircraft was designated as the Gloster E.28/39, also known as the Gloucester 28/39. It made its first successful taxi test in April of 1941, and its first flight on May 15, 1941. The flight lasted 17 minutes. Days later another flight reached a speed of 370 mph and an altitude of 25,000 ft. What Whittle developed highlighted the fact that the concept of jet propulsion (and Frank Whittle's efforts) had been woefully neglected by his country. Winston Churchill was so taken with the turbojet engine he was reported to say, "why don't we build a thousand of these?"

Within weeks of the first flight of the Gloucester E28/39, Gen. Hap Arnold,

Chief of the U.S. Army Air Corps, and his assistant Maj. Donald Keirn, visited England on a fact-finding mission. The purpose of the mission was to assess British aviation technology and discuss the possibility of training British pilots in the United States to strengthen the RAF. While there, they attended a demonstration flight of the E28/39 with Arnold asking, "where are the propellers?" The answer of course was "it's a jet." It was quite obvious to Arnold that the U.S. was woefully behind on a very important technology. Upon his return, General Arnold initiated efforts to enable the United States to work on the development of a jet aircraft. He worked with the State Department, the Air Staff in Washington, DC and the Engineering Division at Wright Field. His efforts resulted in negotiations between the United States Secretary of State and the British Ambassador, allowing the U.S. to share Britain's jet engine and aircraft technology. General Arnold was given the plans for the aircraft's power plant, the Whittle W.1, as well as the plans for the more powerful W.2B/23. On October 1, 1941, a crated W.1 engine and a small team

of PowerJet engineers were flown in the bomb bay of a B-24 Liberator to the States. Years later in an interview for a documentary, Whittle said his engineers were, "fearful someone would pull the wrong lever, and dump them into the Atlantic."

In September of 1941, the GE plant in Lynn, MA, was selected to build 15 engines based on Whittle's designs. This GE plant was selected due to its experience in developing and building turbosuperchargers, which reduced the power loss of aircraft engines at higher altitudes (GE was reported to have made 300,000 turbosuperchargers during WWII.) These engines were to power aircraft designed by Bell Aircraft in Wheatfield, NY. The Wheatfield location was chosen to be due to its proximity to Lynn. The GE engine would be designated as the I-A. At the time, GE's development of the first U.S.-built jet engine was a top-secret program. The project was so secret the engineers tasked with the project were told they would be shot if they leaked anything about the project. In 1942, Frank Whittle traveled to the United States, under an assumed name, and worked with GE on the development of their first engine. They became known at GE's Lynn plant as the "Hush-Hush Boys." Using the Whittle engine as a design basis, the engineers succeeded. The GE I-A engine first ran on April 18, 1942. While working on the engine, GE also worked with Bell Aircraft designer Larry Bell to develop an aircraft for the I-A. On October 1, 1942, Bell test pilot Bob Stanley flew the twin jet Bell XP-59A Airacomet at Muroc Dry Lake, today's Edward's Air Force Base. The second flight was made by Army Colonel Laurence Cragie, the first U.S. military pilot to fly a jet-powered aircraft.

As the Second World War came to an end, the "need for speed," especially with Cold War concerns, became more of an issue. Now there were budgetary constraints. The Navy's budget was cut from \$21.2 billion in 1945 to \$4.3 billion in 1950.

continued...



Bell P-59 Aeracomet

During WWII, Naval Aviation accounted for 25-30% of the total Navy budget, and was roughly the same in 1950. Rather than risk depending on just one or two aircraft manufacturers to “get it right,” the Navy let multiple contracts to many different aircraft manufacturers. Between 1945 and 1959, 22 Navy fighters were developed. From 1959 to 2006, only five were reported to have made their first flights.

There were a number of safety issues associated with the Navy’s transition to jet aircraft. Jet engine response time and poor maneuverability at low speeds were huge factors, especially on straight-deck carriers, along with landing speeds, engine reliability, pitch/yaw stability and limited range. Structural issues and metal fatigue not only plagued early test jet-powered aircraft, but operational aircraft as well. The Ryan FR-1 Fireball was a prime example. The Ryan FR-1 Fireball was the first Navy aircraft to incorporate a jet engine. Early jet engines lacked the required acceleration for carrier operations; consequently, the Fireball had a Wright Cyclone radial engine (with a prop) mounted in the nose and a GE turbojet in the rear fuselage. It became operational in 1945, and was withdrawn from service in mid-1947. The Fireball was provided to a single squadron, VF-66, before the end of WWII, but did not see combat. The aircraft ultimately proved to lack the structural strength

required for carrier-based operations. The name Fireball has been referred to as the most accurate name for a particular aircraft ever given.

The introduction of jet aircraft produced a number of aircraft “firsts.” What follows are just a few. On July 21, 1946, the second prototype of the McDonnell FH-1 Phantom made several take-offs and landings from the USS *Franklin D Roosevelt*. This made the FH-1 (powered by two Westinghouse J-30 WE 20 turbojet engines) the first purpose-built jet aircraft to conduct carrier operations. In 1947, Fighter Squadron VF-17A, flying the FH-1, became the first operational jet squadron to become carrier qualified. On July 3, 1950, flying from the USS *Valley Forge*, the Grumman F9F Panther became the first Navy jet aircraft to fly in combat. On November 18, 1952, flying an F9F-5 Panther from the USS *Oriskany*, U.S. Navy LT E. Royce Williams fought a solo dogfight against seven Russian-piloted MiG-15s, and shot down four of them in a 35-minute melee. His amazing feat was kept secret for 50 years, and his Silver Star was upgraded by the Secretary of Navy in 2023 to the Navy Cross. The Panther was also the first jet aircraft used by the Blue Angels. The first production model of the Cutlass F7U-1 entered service during July 1951, becoming the first swept-wing Navy aircraft. The Cutlass continued to suffer



Royce Williams at Hook 14

from frequent technical and handling problems throughout the aircraft’s short service career. Accidents involving the type were responsible for the deaths of four test pilots and 21 U.S. Navy pilots. More than a quarter of all Cutlasses built were destroyed in accidents. This high rate of accidents led to the type being withdrawn during the late 1950s. During 1957, Chance Vought analyzed the accident record and found with 78 accidents and a quarter of the airframes lost after accumulating 55,000 flight hours, the Cutlass had the highest accident rate of all Navy swept-wing fighters. CAPT Dave Dollarhide said it was



McDonnell FH1 Phantom

known as the “Ensign Eater.” Also entering service in 1951 was the Douglas F3D Skyknight, the first U.S. Navy jet purpose-built as a fire control, radar-equipped night fighter. It served in Korea and Vietnam, and was flown in both wars by the U.S. Marines. The Grumman F11F-1 Tiger was introduced in 1956, and was the first Navy aircraft to reach supersonic speeds. The Douglas A-3 Skywarrior was the first all-jet carrier-based nuclear bomber. It entered service in March of 1956. The Douglas A-4 Skyhawk, introduced in October of 1956, may have been only the second operational carrier-based aircraft without folding wings since the start of WWII. The Douglas Dauntless did not have folding wings, but that was a concern about the wing strength. The A-4 may have been the first operational Navy aircraft since WWI built with a one-piece wing as well as a small cockpit that many say provides the feeling of “strapping on the airplane.” The McDonnell F-4 Phantom was the first Navy fighter to reach Mach 2, and initially designed as a high-altitude interceptor. The McDonnell F/A-18 Hornet was the first Navy aircraft built as a multi-role aircraft including fighter escort, fleet air defense, close air support and aerial reconnaissance.

Stating the obvious, the early Navy jet aircraft did not operate from angled-deck carriers. Who developed the concept? Following the lead of the Royal Navy, the U.S. Navy tested the concept of the angle deck in 1952 by painting angle deck markings on the existing centerline of the USS *Midway* and USS *Antietam* and using them for touch and go landings only. No changes were made to the arresting gear or barriers. In September of 1952, the USS *Antietam* entered the New York Naval shipyard and received a flush port sponson deck which acted as the angle deck. The *Antietam* was the first operational U.S. Navy aircraft carrier with an angled deck. From 1947 until 1957, the U.S. Navy conducted flight operations from several aircraft carriers with straight decks. Twenty-four Essex class carriers were built with twelve being converted to angle decks. In 1959, the USS *Oriskany* was the last Essex Class carrier to rejoin the fleet with an angle deck. All three Midway class carriers, the *Midway*, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, and the *Coral Sea* were the last aircraft carriers built with straight decks. The *Coral Sea* was the last to be converted and rejoined the fleet in September of 1960. All carriers which were converted to

angle decks were also fitted with steam catapults. In 1955, the USS *Forrestal* became the first aircraft carrier purposely built with an angled deck.

Although the subject will not be discussed here in detail, there were cultural issues associated with the transition to jets in terms of pilot safety. Naval Aviators have always had a “can do” attitude, and Naval Aviation has had a history of encouraging self-reliance and independence among its pilots. Unfortunately, cultural changes lagged technical changes in the Navy’s transition to jet aircraft. Things happened much faster in jets, and a different mind-set and discipline was called for to avoid disaster. In the late 1940s and the early ’50s, whole squadrons transitioned directly from prop-driven aircraft to jets. Pilots who developed habits and skills in straight-wing propeller planes which were slower, lighter, simpler and burned fuel more slowly were suddenly put into fast, gas-guzzling jets with much different handling issues. It was a lethal combination. According to one author, the transition resulted in a virtual bloodbath. Due to high aircraft and pilot losses, a more structured program of flight training was introduced, eventually resulting in the establishment of Replacement Air Groups. The establishment of “RAGs” eliminated the higher accident rate of the “seat-of-the-pants” approach to the transition that was so costly. The RAGs were not only essential for the transition from props to jets, but for the transition from one type of jet aircraft to another.

The transition by the U.S. Navy to jet aircraft was not as easy as the word transition makes it sound, and the need for speed required considerably more than a “hold my beer” effort. That said, A-4 pilots can be proud of the fact that 46 Skyhawks remain airworthy worldwide with private owners, contractors and two militaries.

Footnote: The 1950s gave the U.S. Navy the mirror landing system, the angled deck, the turbojet and the supercarrier. The mirror landing system, the angled deck and the turbojet were all courtesy of the British. Not only did England give the United States the turbojet, but they also gave it to the Soviet Union. In July of 1945, Labour Party candidate Clement Attlee defeated Prime Minister Winston Churchill. In 1946, Prime Minister Attlee brokered a deal in which Rolls Royce sold several of their latest jet engines, the RB.41 Nene, to the Soviets. It was done with the understanding they would not use them for military purposes. The Soviets reverse-engineered the Nene and produced the Klimov VK-I. During the Korean War, Soviets pilots flew MiG 15’s against the U.S. Navy and Air Force with the same basic engine they received from England. Without Whittle’s drive and determination, the Korean air war might have been fought with propeller-driven aircraft.

THE AIR BARONS & THE A-4 DEMO

By Mat "Irish" Garretson

In 1958, members of VF-725 created the Air Barons, an informal flight demonstration team whose mission was to highlight the importance and professionalism of the U.S. Naval Air Reserve. Based at NAS Glenview, IL, the team flew less than 70 public demonstrations over the course of its 13-year existence.

The Air Barons' association with the Skyhawk began in July of 1964 when the squadron – redesignated RAW-72 – transitioned to the A-4B. In May of 1970, the Barons upgraded to the A-4L, the aircraft that they would fly until the squadron was decommissioned the following year. Throughout their time with the Skyhawk, the Air Barons' demonstration was basically the same; a 30-minute show consisting of the following maneuvers:

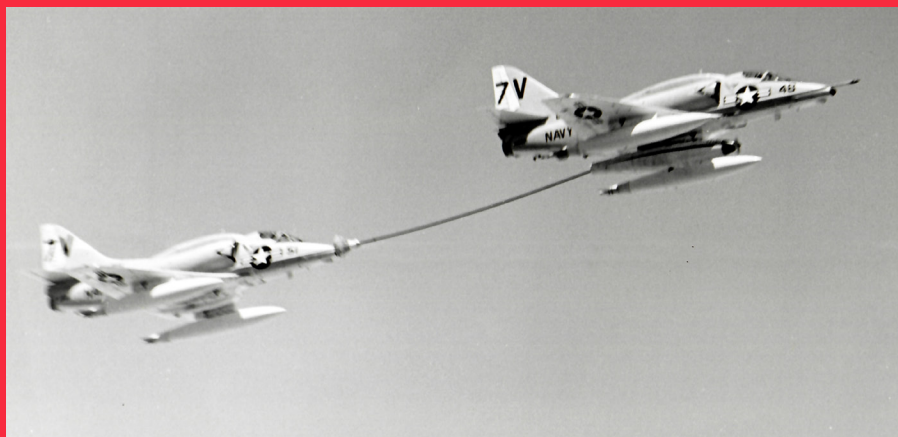
- *Six-plane delta flat pass, with Barons 5 and 6 executing a vertical climb at show center;*
- *Four-plane diamond pass;*
- *Two-ship pass, with Baron 5 refueling Baron 6 with via a centerline-mounted D-704.*
- *Still in refueling mode, Baron 6 flies gear down, simulating battle-damaged approach to runway as delta flies in the background;*
- *Barons 1 and 2 execute opposing passes, each executing a half Cuban Eight at show center;*
- *Barons 5 and 6 approach show line at approximately one-mile AGL, executing a high-angle dive in formation;*
- *Barons 1 and 2 fly a pop-up/roll-ahead in formation;*
- *Barons 1 and 2 fly formation in landing configuration as Barons 3 and 4 fly opposing heading at high speed;*
- *Delta flies a vertical 'bomb burst' maneuver in tribute to POW/MIAs; and,*
- *Division breakup to landing.*



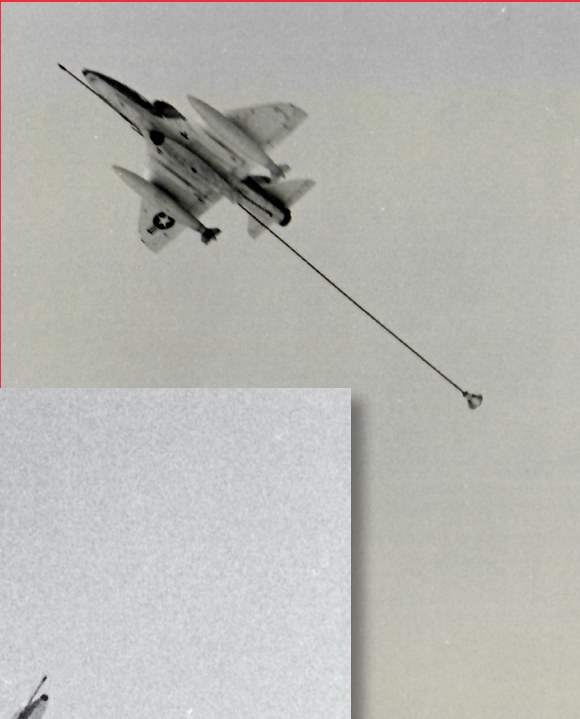
The U.S. Naval Air Reserve Tactical Flight Demonstration Team

AIR BARONS

*I hope that you enjoy
the following collection of
photos of the Air Barons,
taken during their tenure
with the Skyhawk.*



continued...





FROM THE FILES OF
GARY VERVER

RDTE



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 rounds 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.”

(Republish from A-4Ever Skyhawk Journal)



ATTACK SQUADRON FORTY-FOUR

Douglas Service Information Summary – Credit Boeing, Article Boeing

Fighter Squadron Forty-four was reactivated in August of 1950, immediately after the outbreak of hostilities in Korea. The squadron was then flying F4U Corsairs. Operational training continued until January 1951, when they boarded the USS *Mindoro* (CVE-120) for carrier qualifications. Returning from “Carquals,” the squadron remained in the Jacksonville area until March, when they boarded the USS *Coral Sea* (CVA-43) bound for the Mediterranean.

The “Hornets” returned to Cecil Field in October 1951 and began training for their next deployment. The training cycle was nearly complete, when they boarded the *Coral Sea* for a shakedown cruise to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The squadron again deployed aboard the *Coral Sea* for their second Mediterranean cruise on 19 April 1952. Returning in October, the squadron commenced operations at NAS Jacksonville, Florida.

In April 1953, the “Hornets” boarded the USS *Lake Champlain* and sailed for Korea, via the Mediterranean. Joining Task Force Seventy-Seven in Korean waters, the squadron commenced combat operations. The squadron moved its operations temporarily to the USS *Boxer* (CVA-12) in July and sailed for home aboard the *Champ* in October.

The “Hornets” acquired their first jet aircraft in December 1953, when they began flying the F2H-2 “Banshee.” January and February of 1955 were spent aboard the USS *Intrepid* (CVA-11) on a shakedown cruise. In May, they again boarded the *Intrepid* and deployed to the Mediterranean. The squadron returned to the States in November 1955.

Early in January 1956, the men of Fighter Squadron Forty-Four found that they had been redesignated Attack Squadron Forty-Four and soon afterward, received their F9F “Cougars” for their new mission. For seven months,

the “Hornets” trained in the Jacksonville area and in September 1956, joined the rest of Air Group aboard the USS *Saratoga* (CVA-60) for a shake-down cruise to Cuba.

Before the squadron returned to Jacksonville, the Middle East Crisis broke out and they remained just off the coast of Egypt aboard the USS *Saratoga* until the middle of December 1956.

VA-44 spent the first two months in Cuba, improving weapons delivery and returned to Jacksonville at the end of February. Early in April, the “Hornets” effectively proved their training by taking second place in the “All Navy Weapons Meet” in El Centro, California.

In April, May and June, the squadron had detachments aboard the USS *Wasp* flying CAP and intercept missions. In August, the entire squadron came aboard the *Wasp* and joined in four separate NATO exercises that took them in the vicinity of the North Pole.

The year 1958 brought numerous and sweeping changes. The “Hornets,” a fighter squadron from its rebirth in August 1950 to January 1956 and 1957, received word that they were selected by the Chief of Naval Operations for transition as a training squadron for all East Coast jet attack pilots and retention of their VA-44 designation. They soon received the first of their F9F-8Ts and A-4s and began planning an organization which resulted in their merger with FAWTULANT Detachment Alpha early in June 1958. With the dual mission of attack and instrument pilot training firmly established, the “Hornets” confidently assumed the third and newest task assigned to them – the indoctrination and training of enlisted personnel of AIRLANT squadrons flying the A4D Skyhawk.

In October 1958, three VA-44 instructors, LCDR Jim Himyak, LT Jim Willis and LT Ken Wallace



accomplished an amazing first in the tiny Skyhawk when they successfully completed a transoceanic flight from Argentina, Newfoundland, to NAF Port Lyautey, French Morocco. This flight also proved the versatility of the Skyhawk’s in-flight refueling capacity with an AJ tanker.

During the winter months of 1958, VA-44 continued its steady pace of delivering highly qualified jet attack replacement pilots to the Atlantic Fleet. The squadron sent various detachments to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for intensive weapons training (including over-the-shoulder maneuvers) to ensure full qualification of newly designated replacement pilots and of transitioning aviators assigned to the program.

During February 1959, the “Hornets” were substantially increased with the addition of 120 officers and enlisted men from the recently disestablishment of VA-105. VA-44 also acquired 15 AD5 and 6 aircraft and the further task of training propeller attack replacement pilots.

VA-44 was assigned the task of transitioning the entire squadron personnel of VF-81 to the A4D-2, when that squadron was redesignated as an attack squadron.

VA-44 compiled another first in the replacement pilot training program when Captain Hugh Winters, newly designated Commanding Officer of the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, was given a five-day checkout in the A-4 to become familiar with the characteristic of the aircraft and the problems that might confront the aviators landing on the “Roosevelt.”

Deck availability of the USS *Saratoga* and USS *Essex* during June 1959 enabled 17 replacement pilots to carrier qualify prior to reporting to their replacement duty stations, which in some instances, were units already deployed to the Mediterranean. This again proved the effectiveness of the Replacement Air Group (RAG) program in supplying currently qualified Naval aviators to the fleet.

The remainder of 1959 and early 1960 saw the VA-44 enlisted maintenance program operating smoothly, with an average of 35 men per month, each being aboard for a period of approximately 30 days.

Between July 1960 and July 1961, the "Hornets" engaged in 33 deployments for either carrier qualifications aboard ship, or weapons detachments at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. A total of 120 replacement pilots, both A-4D and AD were graduated and sent to the fleet. By August, VA-44 had trained 1,200 enlisted men in all phases of maintenance. The Hornets set a new record, flying 1,900 hops, for a total of 2,635 flight hours.

On 15 February, the propeller contingent of VA-44 was detached from the parent squadron to form Attack

Squadron Forty-Five. Soon after, the Hornets moved their operation to NAS Cecil Field.

The TF9J's were transferred to VA-45 on 1 April 1964 and that squadron assumed the instrument training mission for the COMFAIRJAX area. In addition, 11 permanent officers and 45 enlisted men were reassigned to VA-45. VA-44 retained their A-4B/C aircraft and became a single-purpose squadron devoted solely to the training of light jet attack pilots.

Six USAF pilots reported aboard on 6 May 1965 to conduct project SPARROW HAWK flying the Douglas A-4C. The project was to evaluate the Skyhawk's performance and capabilities in relation to the Air Force fighter mission.

In 1966, the "Hornets" received a revised weapons syllabus to acquaint replacement pilots with tactics currently in use in Southeast Asia.

In May, a new face and uniform checked into the squadron for duty as an instructor pilot. This was Captain D. L Wagner, USAF, who was beginning his Navy/Air Force Exchange Program tour. He made his first carrier landing aboard the USS *Lexington* (CVS 16) on 2 August 1966.

VA-44 received the first of its new TA-4F trainers in August. CDR M. E. Malan accepted the aircraft and was the first squadron pilot to fly the two-seater.

During 1966, VA-44 qualified 172 replacement pilots in all phases of light attack aviation. These pilots, with their instructors, flew a total of 27,852 flight hours, made 3,039 carrier landings and expended 384 tons of practice and live ordnance. During this period, the use of Bullpup and Shrike was introduced into the weapons syllabus.

In 1967, VA-44 was presented the CNO Safety Award for the fewest number of aircraft accident/incident free hours as a RAG outfit.

During the year 1968, VA-44 once again received an Air Force officer, Captain Michael A. Korte, beginning his Navy/Air Force Exchange Program tour. Captain Korte is working in the Operations Office and is also an instructor pilot. Throughout the year, the squadron continued to perform their duties in an outstanding manner. Routine operations resulted in 20,405 flight hours being flown for the year, with an average of 39 aircraft on board. In addition to their assigned duties of training replacement pilots, VA-44 received and transferred 107 aircraft to other activities.



Cecil Field. Photo USN.

SPECIAL AWARD FOR BACKSLIDING



SPECIAL AWARD FOR BACKSLIDING

Although LTJG Bob "wimpy" Lawrence was selected as the winner of the "Crutch of the Clansmen" award for June 1966 it was felt that due to the closeness of the race this month a special award should be given to our own "Golden Tail Hook".

After vaulting into prominence in the month of May by winning the title as the best carrier aviator aboard USS SARATOGA, LT Bill "Red Baron" Kish showed how a real backsliding sniveler works. His carrier proficiency grade has dipped so low as to become almost unmentionable. His constant whinning, begging and groveling for any OK pass from the ISO's leads one to believe he has even been dropped from that fraternity. His inability to face the reality that he is really a plumber unworthy of the Golden Tail Hook has merely worsened a bad situation. And finally his unfailing ability to miss the number 3 wire has entitled him to special recognition.

Therefore this special award for backsliding is presented to that real flash in the pan — LT Bill Kish!



Bill Kish



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



Marvin Quaid, December/16/2024, Monterey, CA

Steve Bakke, February/13/2025, Westminster, CO

Dick Stratton, January/18/2025, Mayport, FL

J.R. "Hotdog" Brown, January/15/2025, Midlothian, VA

TAPS notices may be sent to Dave Dollarhide

• davedollarhide@msn.com •

Puresome Unplugged

~ The Further Adventures of Youthly Puresome ~

By CDR Jack D. Woodul, USNR(Ret)

A PURESOME AIR PERIL

The Squadron Ops puked advised YP that he was rapidly running out of his ejection seat qual, not good, no fly fast jet! So, wot to do? Aha! NAS New Orleans had such a trainer, so Youthly snagged a Mighty, 55-foot-long Crusader, whose burner goes boom boom and wing goes up and down (or, it's the fuselage that does that, wotever). Finally one came available late in the day that was not gushing hydraulic fluid; blastoff was achieved and a landing in the darkness at N'Orlens was jolly enough. So, two quick cold beers an a bagout at the BOQ without being et by gators or fanged by slithery things.

Rode the ejection seat up the rails, got the required stamps and notations in the log book. No Muffalata's or oyster Po' boys at the ops grill, but a suitable cheeseburger sufficed. Time for RTB.

Well now then there. This was back in the wonderful days when a chap could fly VFR below FL 240 -- no steeking IFR unless it was REALLY crap WX -- and so a VFR flight plan back to Navy Dallas was filed. It was summertime, so some thunderstorms were expected along a cold front out there, said the wx man. Looking out the window, YP could see wot looked like a solid line of nasties that seemed to extend from roughly Mexico City up to Chicargo. No sweat, sez YP, my mighty jet knows no fear, and I won't tell anyone if I have to sneak above FL240. All the important bits seemed to be attached to the

Crusader, so boom boom went the burner and zoom zoom went the jet.

It shortly became apparent that the line of TRW's were rather higher than FL 240, By quite a bit. No sweat--boom boom went the burner, zoom zoom went the jet. Seems like the tops were between 50 and 52, 000', with regular peaks up thru that, like a picket fence.

Staggering along just out of the clag, YP was aware that this was not good. To stay out of the clag took occasionally resorting to the burner, which about half the time did not light. Etai, Japanese word for pain! Nozzles opened, no belch fire, loss of thrust, down into the clags. Quick outta burner, close the nozzles, pick up some lost smash and hoping not to encounter a hard part of cloud.

Try again on the burner, and, YES! Regain enough smash to get back on top.

Now, YP was also aware he was not wearing a pressure suit. If his pressurization hiccuped, things would go pear shaped. There were these lumpy clouds all around. Even though it was a relatively short flight from N'Orlens to Navy Dallis, and he was way up high, he was using fuel at more than an ordinary rate, due to excessive use of Mr. Burner to save his hiney.

Grampa Pettibone was definitely jumping up and down, screaming "Jumpin' Jehosephat!" Yet once again, YP assured the Big Guy that he would join the Boy's Soprano Chorus at Sunday School if'n he'd hep him just a little, one more time.



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

And, right quickly, he popped out into clear blue skies behind the frontal thunderstorms. YP slowly retarded the throttle to idle and back an RCH to close the nozzles, and eased out of hyperspace and boiling blood country. He figgered he could idle descend to practically the Westerly Coast, and would not flame out and look bad before he got home. He even had enough petrol for a Sierra Hotel break back at the Home Patch. Yessssss! Piece of pie!

But sometimes, on the darkest nights when Texas thunderous storms boomed and lightening spat fire, YP would remember the Boy's Soprano Chorus thing. Someday, when it's sunny, I got to do that. **Grandpa Pettybone just lurked in the background, smiling. He knew the boy!**



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustration by Ted Wilburn



TINS!*

From Dave Dollarhide

This may not be the truth, but it's the way I remember it.

Close Call at the 2016 Tico Airshow



Hide and Chris, daughter-in-law Kelly, and Bill and Terri.

It was the weekend of my 76th birthday and would be my last time to fly the Skyhawk. However, it was a three day show with a lot of good flying to be had and I didn't have time to think about that word, LAST!

Good friends, Bill "The Red Baron" and Terri Kish were there from their home in Hawaii, a real treat, but they were not there for my dang birthday. The old A-4 "Charlie" was the big draw, but either way, it was great to see them.

The "Baron" had spent a lot of time flying combat in the Skyhawk and imparted all kinds of savvy flying "gouge" to me, later while flying together in VA-46 at NAS Cecil.



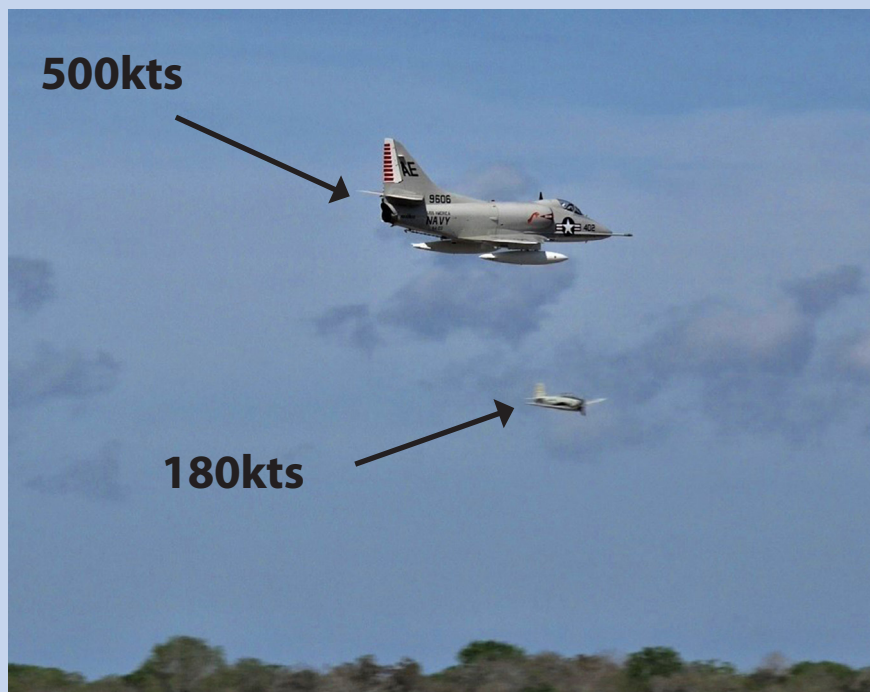
The all-pilots brief.

Our “mechs,” today, Dave Brown and Phil Ricker, the ground crew, did their part of getting the J-65 started and through the post start checks and I began the taxi to the other side of the airfield for the long runway. There were several antique prop types holding short and I taxied past them to use the entire length behind them.

It was not a long wait and I finally pushed the J-65’s throttle up and began the takeoff, with the characteristic smoke and oil blowing down the side of the jet. In the preflight brief, I had been told to hold west of the field, until the Air Boss called me in for a high-speed pass.



Phil Ricker and Dave Brown.



As I recall, the theme of the show was a Korean War scenario and I made my holding pattern well clear and watched from afar. (I know, wrong vintage jet.) The “Boss” told me to start my pass by the crowd and my brain said, “all the speed you can git, Hide!” I poked the nose over with the “throttle bent.” The airspeed showed just short of 500kts when I heard the Boss yell, “A-4, pull up, pull up, hold it, hold it!!”

I never saw the T-28, who was flying down the wrong runway at maybe 180kts. I continued as briefed and finished my part of the show, landing to hear Phil and Dave excitedly tell me how close the near-miss had been, as did several spectators. A professional photographer gave me the documenting photo.



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