

THE FLYER

1

Published By Jackson Chapter 304 Of The Experimental Aircraft Association February 2007

Chapter Meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month at the Sport Aviation Center, 3600 Wildwood Ave, Jackson, Michigan 49202-1811 unless otherwise published....

This month's Meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 7th at 7:30PM.

CONTENTS:

1 – CHAPTER NOTES

2 – DIAMONDBACKS!

8 – PACER PROJECT

CHAPTER NOTES

The Air Zoo Trip

The Air Zoo is looking forward to our visit... they are exploring adding more security and double locking all of their more priceless exhibits...

We will be leaving the Sport Aviation Center at 8:30am on Saturday morning February 10, 2007 via car caravan and head to Kalamazoo... The Museum opens at 10:00am...

Since we are an organized tour group you will receive 15% off the standard admission. Your admission fee will be as follows:

Adults (Age 16-59)	\$16.58
Seniors (60+)	\$14.88
Kids (5-15)	\$13.18
Kids Under 5	No Charge.

We also will have a tour of the Air Zoo Restoration Center... We have advised them to expect between, 30 to 50 in our group. Remember your spouses, friends, etc. are welcome to enjoy the day....

2007 Membership Dues

This will be the last call for your 2007 Membership Dues... Remember your Treasurer is a real nice guy...

But the Assistant Treasurer, Chuck Ferguson, that you elected last November, isn't... He becomes really difficult to control when members don't pay-up...

In the business of collections he is called "*Chuck The Enforcer...*"

To his friends he's known as "*Chuckie The Wacker...*"

In the field of medicine he's just called "*Charles The Psychopath...*"

He makes *Al Capone* look like an *Alter Boy*. For entertainment he watches reruns of the *Saint Valentines Massacre* and thinks it's a comedy. To him the *Mafia* is a communal social club, like the *YMCA...*

So, please mail in your 2007 dues payment... or "*He'll make you an offer you can't refuse...*"

The Big "C"

Boy, it must have been a real slow day at the *Sport Aviation Center* because the guys made some progress on the *English Wheel*. Now movable, our next step in the process was to obtain some English forming wheels so the brackets and screw adjuster could be fabricated.

Therefore, a flat working surface wheel and several curved surface wheels were ordered from *Metalcraft Tools in Tennessee...* The wheels are hardened to approximately 33 Rockwell, and can be used to metal form compound curves of just about any material with the exception of stainless steel...

I believe we have some members with limited experience with the English

Wheel, but I'm sure it will be a learning experience for all... In the end there will be no compound curve we can't conquer...

DIAMONDBACKS!

By

Rear Admiral Peter B. Booth, USN (Ret.)

*Excerpted from
True Faith and Allegiance*

*Published by Foundation, Fall 2006,
Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, Inc.*

The diamondback snake was deadly, so to were its sea-based namesakes, 12 sleek jets and 250 of our nation's best and brightest. This is a two-year snapshot of these everyday heroes during some tough times around and over Vietnam...

Bill "Burner" Beardsley was my wingman. The good news was that he was in a perfect combat spread – about a mile or so abeam. The bad news was that it was dark and we were over the dead center of Vietnam at 10,000 feet looking for targets of opportunity in the countryside below. But the really bad news was that Burner had his external lights on bright and flashing, including the strobes! It was just another uneventful mission over Vietnam in that summer of 1968...

We had gone through an identical training and build-up regimen as we had with VF-74 and USS Forrestal (CVA-59) the preceding year. What an unbelievable team we had – a great and talented squadron, an equally combat-ready, 85-airplane air wing, the most awesome ship with the best leadership I've ever seen, and even a fine admiral's staff. The blackness of the Vietnam hole had yet to sink in on the American people, and there was only the occasional whisper of



*Above: USS America in the Gulf of Tonkin
(Photo unknown)*

discontent. We were warriors, we were trained to do the military will of our nation's leaders and we were the epitome of combat readiness...

Rear Admiral Roger Mehle, a World War II fighter pilot, came down to wish us well as we flew out to *USS America (CVA-66)* underway off *Norfolk* for eventual combat early in 1968. We had a good feeling about ourselves and stood just a little taller when the admiral told us to “give’em hell.”

Our squadron, the *VF-102 Diamondbacks*, had beautiful, brand-new *F-4 Phantom IIs* right out of the St Louis, Missouri factory. The systems all worked, and importantly, included a new-type of Doppler radar that allowed us to look down and still pick up airborne targets. I was Maintenance Officer and what a nice deal it was to have shiny new airplanes that would break when you looked at them...

On our training work ups, we spent lots of time at sea on super-carrier *America*, flew more at night than in the day, dropped hundreds of bombs and rocket, practiced several dozen, 30-airplane alpha strikes and filled in with the perpetual combat air patrol.

The air wing was by far and away the most sophisticated wing in the Navy – *E2C Hawkeye’s* that could detect incoming aircraft an order-of-magnitude better than their predecessor, *A-7E Corsair II* that could fly faster than 300 knots with a normal bomb load of 12,500-pounds bombs and hit with awesome accuracy, and the latest version of the super-sophisticated *EA-6B Prowlers*, Plus, we had all the latest in black box wizardry to thwart the growing missile arsenal of the *North Vietnamese*.

Our *Phantoms* were really slick airplanes. They were about 1,000 pounds heavier than our early models back in 1961. But crammed with the latest state-of-the-art gadgetry including: automatic throttles, euphemistically called “*the approach power compensator system*,” leading-edge droops in the stabilator to help the airplane rotate quicker on cat shots; electronics on top of electronics; drooped ailerons to fly slower on approach; a revolutionary radar and alas; the capability to land hands-off on the carrier!

I’ve been scared a few times coming back to land on board ship, but none gets the heart rate up more than a fully-automatic Mode I night-carrier landing to a trap totally untouched by either hand... It went like this: While hundreds of miles from the ship, you engaged the auto-pilot and “coupled” the airplane to an airborne E-2C or shipboard system. That system then flew the airplane like a drone. All I had to do was drop the gear, flaps and hook and hit a few buttons. It’s the weirdest flying I’ve ever done, in an absolute black hole at 1,200 feet and 10 miles astern of the ship with the stick pumping furiously, the rudders pulsating and both throttles jumping to and fro! What made most buys not like the system is that for the average carrier pilot, it flies a better carrier pass than he can. This was true most of the time and this little caveat is what got the heart rate on the occasional high end...

Our euphoria for the war was at a high warble, for we were bombing everything in sight including some targets with minimal military value. When we were not bombing or doing “*night recce*” over the beach, we were providing air cover for the ship in the *Gulf of Tonkin* in the direction of *Haiphong*. These CAP hops were a study in contrast, for we would sit in air-conditioned comfort at 20,000 feet, 25-or-so miles from *Haiphong Harbor*, get refueled a couple of times to keep our fuel nearly full (combat package) and watch all the foreign ships heading into North Vietnam to unload their war-making wares. You didn’t have to be a Ph.D. to realize that the next night we’d have to be trying to ferret out these same supplies wending their way southward by bicycle and *WBLC* (water-borne logistic craft – really sampans).

One day on our first line period, we lost our skipper, *Commander Gene Wilbur* and his RIO, *Lieutenant Bernie Rupinske*. His wingman, *Lieutenant Emory Brown*, saw the *MiG* close behind *Gene* and called for this leader to “*break hard right*,” but got no response. *Emory* fired a *Sparrow missile* at the homeward-bound enemy, but to no avail. *Bernie*, we think, went down with the airplane and *Gene* became

a long-term *POW*. It was a sad day, for both fliers were respected and liked within the squadron...

That first line period we flew mostly at night. In fact, our normal flight operations were from 1800-0600, for 40 days straight. We really got comfortable around the boat at night, which is a statement few Naval Aviators get a chance to make. Usually, returning to the ship at night generates at least an order-of-magnitude increase in your resting pulse rate...

A typical-night hop for us had one aircraft loaded with a bunch of magnesium flares in 18 pods and the other aircraft with six 500-pound bombs. No matter what our mission, we always carried a minimum of two heat-seeking *Sindwinders* and two radar-guided *Sparrows*. We would launch, take on 3,000 pounds of fuel from one of our friendly airborne tankers, go feet dry over the beach and look for targets of opportunity. When the weather was good, we could usually make out bends in the river or a bridge on our radar. Out would go a covey of flares at about 5,000 feet and number 2 would lay some bombs at whatever. WBLCs or bridge he could see. Invariably, there would be a visual snake or two of colorful 37mm tracer fire. Usually, the only thing that could get us into trouble was leaving our external lights on!

Later on in that deployment, I recall a similar mission in which the weather was bad and we essentially dropped our loads in some obscure river, because we couldn't see anything and it was a "no-no" to bring live ordnance back aboard. It was my second over-the-beach flight that night, I was tired, wanted to hit the sack, but as was *derigueur*, had to debrief with the intelligence guys, I told him, "We didn't hit anything."

"You had to hit something," says the staff guy. I stood firm. A staff commander came in and we went through the same exercise. Thought I didn't acquiesce, I'll opine that the report went in "Destroyed 17 WBLCs last seen exploding and burning." The PR aspect of the war was

becoming a driving force, or so it seemed to some of us guys on the deck plates...

We had a light-attack skipper who seemed to always get his name in the daily public relations drivel that went out from the ship. "Jack E. Russ, 39, Orange Park, Florida." Made the news quite often and we all thought it kind of funny. Jack, though, was a good guy and, like all of us, just doing his thing the best he knew how...

One day my dad came out to see "his boys" and his oldest son. Dad was a three-star admiral, head of the Atlantic Fleet and on an inspection trip to see his two carriers in action off *Vietnam*. I was kind of sensitive about my dad because of his position and mine (a lowly lieutenant commander). Earlier in our training in the *Puerto Rico* area, I had been detailed to fly him in one of our F-4s from *Oceana* to the ship- a 1,200 mile trip. We had been a little late getting off and, in order to make our scheduled recovery time at the ship, we had done the last 200 miles supersonic. We made a fast letdown, smoked into the break at 400 knots, frantically cleared the fog from the windscreen rolling into the groove (I'd forgotten to put the heat up) and barely snagged the last arresting wire. Dad thought it was great and I was pretty proud of him too...

At any rate, we had a nice visit, dinner, movie et al, and at 0100 I launched into a black *Gulf of Tonkin* night to do my thing. Dad awoke at whatever hour admirals' wake up and asked if I had slept good.... I loved it!

One night my good friend and fellow maintenance office in our sister squadron, *VF-33*, Lieutenant Commander Zeke Burns, was shot down (we were airborne nearby) by a SAM and he and his pilot Lieutenant Commander John Holtzclaw ejected. They were about 30 miles inland, so a SAR rescue Helo was dispatched to attempt a pickup. Then ensued one of Naval Aviation's incredible stories of survival, guts and determination on the part of a lot of folks that night. Because the area that Zeke landed in was infested

with *North Vietnamese Troops*. Using a handheld radio, they vectored in the pilot of the rescue Helo, *Lieutenant Junior Grade Clyde Lassen*. Braving gunfire from all directions, *Zeke and John* were picked up and deposited on a destroyer with but five-minutes of fuel left in the rescue helo. *Clyde's Medal of Honor* citation is an awesome litany of four guys in a rickety old helo on an overland trip, low on fuel and hundreds of folks on the ground trying to kill them. It was just another chapter in the heroism repeated thousands of times each day in this eight-year-war...

Our new skipper was a seasoned fighter pilot named *Ted Fellowes*. *Ted* was probably the most engaging and likeable person I've known. He also had made two combat tours flying the *F-8 Crusader*, and his brother (a classmate of mine) had been shot down and was presumed to be a POW. My recollection – right or wrong – was that *Ted's* prime objective was to get all of us, and our airplanes back to *Oceana* in one piece...

The *Diamondbacks* were blessed with seven, spring-loaded-to-the-go-position lieutenant commanders in addition to the CO and XO, both full commanders. Day by day and night by night we did our best in the air and about the ship. Hard work, good spirits, teamwork and honest leadership were common traits. We were pros, good at our chosen profession, and proud of it. But, we had glimmers of disappointment in the way the war was being fought. We wanted to go north; we wanted to hit the ships in *Haiphong Harbor*; we wanted to go into the *Laos* sanctuaries just 100-miles to the west. The bosses would have none of it. And even if they had wanted to, it would have made no difference, for unbeknownst to us, the war was being *minutely manipulated out of a big white house at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., by an unknown covey of gratuitous advisors and a political president in way over his head...*

The politics of the war in our case in that summer of 1968 dictated that we were prohibited from attacking the enemy's underbelly up north. Earlier and later in

the war, the action in the north in and around Hanoi was far more intense than we were to experience simply because the northern targets were more lucrative and therefore more heavily defended with gobs of Soviet-supplied AAA and SAMs. But even in our case, the available targets were subject to micro-manipulations from inside the Washington beltway. The list of allow able targets was heavily skewed to the restrictive side of the ledger...

I had a real scare one night after a 0200 catapult shot with a full load of flares. It was one of those hurry-up evolutions and the ordnance was loaded after we manned up. Well, for some reason, four flares in one pod weren't locked in, and upon launching from the number-one cat on a particularly dark night, I noticed an eerie glow in the rear-view mirrors. What happened was the flares had stayed put in accordance with some law of inertia when the catapult took us from 0 to 160 knots in 2.3 seconds, and of course, ignited as they were supposed to. From 5,000 feet overhead, it looked as if the entire forward part of the ship was on fire! *USS Oriskany (CVA-34)* had a terrible flare-fed-fire a couple of years before, so we all knew the extreme danger of one flare on a flight deck full of bombs, rockets and fuel. And, the haunted personal memories of the *Forrestal* fire one-year prior added to my brain's confusion. *USS America's* problem was compounded by the combination of 30 knots of wind over the deck and deployed flare parachutes dragging the flares aft. This heart-stopping story had a happy ending: a couple of average young American sailors grabbed the parachutes and hurled the burning infernos over the side and into the sea where, even underwater, they continued to burn... More Average heroes!

We had about 150 aviators aboard *America* and 5,300 others. Cooks, fuelers, engineers, clerks, ordnance handlers, airplane fixers, dentist, et al. Made the ship go. When you look back on our country in that summer of 1968, it was becoming a turbulent mosaic of drugs, draft dodgers, massive discontent racial problems and so on. But on the great ship *America*, even

though it wasn't all peaches and cream, it worked. Our guys did their job twelve-hours a day, seven-days a week, far from home and loved ones, in austere living conditions and for an hourly rate of pay for less than the minimum federal standards. Many did it two and three times in a row before going back home or to shore duty. What great people they were, this team of 5,500, from all parts of the country, young and old, various ethnic and religious and economic backgrounds and how grateful am I for their enormous sacrifice and contributions!

One thing good about being on a carrier is that the mail comes almost every day. In our case, we had a small, twin-engine *CIACOD* airplane for mail and logistics and its nickname, appropriately, was *Miss America*. When *Miss America* was in the groove to land, the boatswain mate on watch would dutifully play the, "*Here she comes, Miss America*" theme song, and several thousand troops would smile and be thankful for the little things...

We had two carrier COs during that period who taught me a lot about enthusiastic and positive leadership. One morning, a booming voice with no need for introduction came on the loudspeaker system with an upbeat, "*Good morning America! I want you to know we have just won five of six "Es" for excellence.*" Indeed, *America* was a super ship with an even greater crew. That's why she won all those "*Es*" for being the best! The pervasive voice was that of *Captain Fox Turner*, a spring-loaded leader who set the standards, was fair and cared for the troops and the troops knew it, *Quid pro quo* – something for something...

Don Engen was *America's* previous CO and while our ship's airplane was *Miss America* and the ship just *Plain America*, *Don* was *Mr. America*. Tall, confident, an extraordinary aviator and unimpressed with his own importance. *Don* was to me the ultimate leader. He did much to keep the collective bubble pumped up!

We were dirty, sweaty, had been shot at, we landed, were debriefed and within 45 minutes later we were seated in the off-

icer's wardroom all cleaned up and laughing and scratching as "our" table. "Our" table consisted of VF-102's stable of lieutenant commanders, plus a few others. Our table's leader was *Gordo Murray*, an easy-going, friendly, original no-sweat artist who fancied himself the world's greatest aviator. He flew with *Gar Magnus*, a bear of a backseater whose nickname came from the once-a-mission cigar he lit up in the back seat, no matter the type of hop. Served by smiling stewards, we almost dined rather than ate and always had steady stream of laughs, usually led by *Gordo*. When *Gordo* laughed, it took a hardened soul not to join in...

As astronauts en route to the moon would one day watch our shrinking globe, so too would the enormously busy enclave of a carrier viewed from high above evoke wonder? The activity quotient with in never slowed, but went on around the clock. Indeed, there were as many troops up and working at 0200 as at 1400. Sleep eat, watch an occasional movie, fly, brief, de-brief, hawk the intelligence center for the latest photos of targets, tour the maintenance spaces and chat with your troops, fly, write a letter and so on. Excepting the thump and vibration of the four big catapults and thunder of the jets, the ship was quiet – no bells to tell the time and no yakking over the ship's PA system (except a daily update late in the afternoon by the Captain).

The regimen for the troops was much the same – 12 hours on and 12 off. Work, eat, sleep, write letters home and more work. Humping 40 pounds of chain, heavy fueling hoses, tending boilers far below, loading ordnance and little time to reflect on their more fortunate shore-based brethren in hometown USA...

The aviators, of course, were the pointy end of America's spear and highly visible, particularly in landing. Each squadron placed a high priority on quality carrier landings and maintained the inevitable "greenie board" in the most prominent spot in the ready room. Green was good, yellow was marginal and red was bad. The landing signal officers (LSOs) from their vantage point far aft of the flight

deck decided landing grades. No matter the rank of the pilot, the works of the LSO were sacrosanct and not even the big carrier's honcho atop the bridge would venture to counteract...

Mode I, fully automatic. Though the heart rate of most pilots coming aboard a carrier on a black night is about double the resting pulse rate, I guarantee that the automatic approaches add another 10%.



Above: Diamondback F-4J Phantom coming in for landing with an empty fuel tank and unused Sparrow and Sidewinder Missiles (Photo: RADM Peter B. Booth Collection)

Landing a big, fast flying (145knot) Phantom aboard a carrier is mostly an exercise in discipline – the pilot must put the airplane where he knows it ought to be. The guy that gets an occasioned “yellow” or even “red.” Is most likely one who just does not work the airplane to the “nth” degree, but relaxes a bit. Testimony to this sense of excellence and folks on the ships, is that most squadrons will display a “greenie board” that is mostly green. There is one exception: the automatic carrier landing. Many of the airplanes aboard *America* had the capability to land totally hands off, including the *Phantom*...

Most pilots did not like to do this, but every five or six landings at night were

The problem is that most aviators like the notion of being master of their own destinies rather than the recipient of trillions of speeding electrons. A Mode I landing gets the auspicious remembrance on the “greenie board” of a blank space...

One personal flashback regarding carrier landings: On one 60-day line period, my carrier landing grades put me number three in the air wing out of some 100 pilots. I mention this because only eight short years prior when flying the *F3H Demon* aboard *USS Hancock*, I came within a hair's breath of losing my wings as a result of a rash of unsatisfactory landings at night out in the stormy *South China Sea*... And the reason I insert this mini-tale is that from that moment on during winter 1960, I worked at almost every landing ashore with the same mindset as an actual carrier landing – day and night. If my airspeed or lineup for it on the next landing. Consistently excellent carrier landings are the result of minute attention to detail and a mental attitude that accepts nothing less than perfect...

One day near the end of the deployment, the time came for all pilots to get our periodic standardization check to determine if we were flying like the book told us to. It was the ultimate in dumbness, because we had been flying together intensely for over a year and there was very little about any pilot's abilities or idiosyncrasies that was sacrosanct. Nonetheless, *Gar* was to check all the pilots.

Well, *Burner Bill*, my wingman, had a habit when he was on a *CAP* hop (no bombs or rackets) to roll inverted and hold one negative G for the maximum allotted time of 10 seconds. He would never tell *Mike Jolsin*, he regular RIO and old Mike just figured everyone did this. So, here comes senior RIO and NATOPS checker, *Gar Magnus*. Now *Gar*, once airborne, always loosened his straps, got out his sand ash-tray, took off his oxygen mask and lit up a big stogie. So, we're up on *CAP*, 30 miles off *Haiphong* on a gorgeous morning with the sun just starting to peek at us, the center-line tanks about empty, when *Burner*, as was his way, gently pulls up his nose, rolls inverted, holds it for 10 seconds and puts exactly one negative G on the air-plane. *Gar*, ashtray, cigar and foul words were all over the back seat. They pulled up close alongside and I could tell *Gar* was really torqued off... I thought at first they had a bee in the cockpit, so frantic were the backseat machinations. When we landed, old *Burner* got a "down" from *Gar* which of course, made zero difference, for *Burner* was out again that night trying to make big holes in the north *Vietnam* transportation links...

We lost another pilot soon after this – *Chuck Parrish*. If *Don Engen* was Mr. America, *Chuck* was Mr. Junior America – smart, a good stick, a motivated and smiling junior-officer leader, he took a direct hit from a 37mm during a bomb run and went in with the airplane. His RIO, *Bob Fant*, barely made it out and was captured to become a many-year *POW*. It was doubly sad because *Chuck* was *Captain Don Engen's* son-in-law.

Our final line period at an end, we had a memorable party in the ready room behind closed doors, a scene replicated in six other ready rooms throughout the big warship. Then it was docking at *Cubi Point* in the *Philippines* and a departure for most of the wing back to the states in a chartered DC-8. *What a trip!*

To begin with, we hadn't been airborne an hour when, near the northern part of the *Philippines*, the giant people-hauler starts to orbit. After some 15 minutes, the pilot came on the air announced he was lost and "was there anyone who could fly an airplane aboard?" Then, prior to landing in *Tokyo* for fuel, he came up again and asked over the PA system if he "should let his new co-pilot make the landing?" to which 150 aviators chorused in unison, "no way." When the co-pilot greased it on, there was a huge round of cheers and applause from the back end of the airplane, the ultimate in aviation accolades...

If you want to see a bunch of combat-hardened and raucous aviators go deathly quiet, put them in the back end of a big airliner with a bunch of very bright and noisy thunderstorms in the night sky... So it was the last couple of hundred miles into *Norfolk* and home. Give any of us on that airplane the choice of a night combat mission or bouncing around in the packed back end of that DC-8 in thunderstorms and it would be unanimous!

But we were home, and that was sweet...
.... (*The End*)

Pacer Project

We are off to a little slow start but the members are working on the left wing... At some point this wing was damaged and repaired poorly, which we will correct. The fuel tank has been pulled and will be cleaned and inspected and pressure tested. The control steel cables, although usable, will be replaced with stainless steel cables and there are some other minor corrections to be made along the way.

Once this wing is ready for covering we will inspect the rudder, horizontal and

vertical stabilizers, elevator, flaps, rudder, and ailerons and cover them at the same time.

Our thought is to get the aforesaid sections up to the sliver coat and then set them aside and bring in the right wind... and repeat the process...

The fuselage will be the last to enter the restoration shop...

“Snips” Phalen is on-top of this project like a “*Bear in the Honey Jar*” and more than likely “*Mister Nitpicker Phalen*” will drive us nuts, but that’s a good thing because it’s better to do it right the first time, than to have to do it over.... Plus, just executing all the AD’s (1958 to Present) on this aircraft is a task-in-it-self...

So all you chapter members that raised their hand and wanted a chapter project to work on, here it is and we better see your smiling faces in the restoration shop...

Your only possible excuse for not showing up might be something like “*death or dismemberment.*” And then, the excuse must be accompanied by a death certificate or doctor’s explanation....

Footnote: In the January 2007 Issue of the “Flyer” it was reported, in error, that Gary Hess had planned on giving his son Alex the Pacer on his sixteenth birthday.

Well, Alex was really excited when he read the newsletter, and Gary went ballistic... The newsletter editor was informed that this was an error in print and that Gary had planned to “Solo” his son in the Pacer on his birthday not give the aircraft to him.

You know Alex, sometimes life just isn’t fair, is it....

The editor stands corrected... Although one must note in the Celtic language the term “Solo” means “To Give...” But how many people in the twenty-first century speak Gaelic... Other than leprechauns, elves, the other wee people of the forest and, of course, your newsletter editor...

Kitfox On Skis

Lynn Matteson has been doing quite a bit of research and has come up with a Ski design for his Kitfox... Lynn has been flying the heck out of his LSA and a little snow isn’t going to stop him... Hopefully he’ll bring a ski, finished or unfinished, to the meeting and discuss the project with us...

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