



UNSCRAMBLE

**The Official Quarterly Newsletter of
Valiant Air Command, Inc.**

Quarter 4 2024

Topics



Commander's Report

Bob Boswell
pg 4-5



Executive Officer's Report

Marvin Juhl
pg 6



Finance Officer's Report

Tracy Bohrmann
pg 7



Procurement Officer's Report

Martin Pring
pg 8-9



PR Officer's Report

David Shores
pg 9



S.T.E.M. Coordinator's Report

Louis M. DePaemelaere
pg 11



Webmaster's Report

Martin Pring
pg 12



Curator's Corner

Jack Bradford
pg 14



Guest Article

CAPT Don Fraser, USN (ret)
pg 16

MUSEUM AND GIFT SHOP - OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK - 9 AM TO 5 PM

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day,
Air Show and Special Event days as required

Beginnings...

The Oxford English dictionary defines the word scramble as “an effort to perform an action or achieve a result hurriedly, clumsily, or in an uncontrolled and undignified manner”. Originating during the Battle of Britain, scrambling has come to be known in military aviation as the act of mobilising aircraft as quickly as possible in reaction to an immediate threat, usually to intercept hostile aircraft.



It thus stands to reason that a busy facility such as the Valiant Air Command, Inc. would need a place to “UnScramble” after the flurries of activity described in each edition of our quarterly newsletter. This literary collection serves as a reminder to each member of the staff, the board, and the public that the VAC is a living, breathing entity, and that each event planned and project undertaken works toward a common goal set forth by the museum’s original 12 founders in 1977: finding, acquiring, and preserving a collection of legacy military aircraft with which to educate visitors about the significant contributions these aircraft and their pilots made to history.



MH-53 Sea Dragon (also featured on front cover)

Volunteers are the backbone of Valiant Air Command, Inc. We operate with a minimal paid staff, but it is our community of volunteers that is responsible for most of the major activities in the museum – from maintaining and flying aircraft to educating and guiding our guests, or organizing our social and special events. We are always looking for good people to join the VAC family.

Many volunteers start out as tour guides and then move into an area that interests them. While we do ask for a minimum commitment of 4 hours a week, most people contribute much more. Our volunteers come from diverse backgrounds – some have years of experience in aviation, while others have no prior experience with warbirds but are interested in finding a rewarding opportunity to support the community. The minimum age for volunteer applications is 18. To fill out our volunteer application, visit our website at www.valiantaircommand.com/volunteer.

Statement of Purpose

The Valiant Air Command Inc. was formed to perpetuate the history of aviation, to encourage gathering of men and women in camaraderie, research and Warbird restoration, to serve as an educational tool for young and old alike; and to assure that the memory of those who gave their lives in service to their country shall not perish.

Commander's Report



2024 was a remarkably busy year for the VAC. Continuing construction of our new Events Center occupied most of our time as we worked to sort out all the local permit changes and the associated expense. Beginning with the 9-month construction start delay and continuing with all the additional delays, the final completion cost will now exceed the initial budget by over 30%. Our Finance Officer Tracy Bohrmann has been working extremely long hours working both our internal funding requirements and all external grants we can apply for to help with the construction costs. The bottom line is that we had to apply for a loan to complete the project. We are continuing to look for sponsors and donors to help with the completion. Without any further delays, the Event Center should be complete by April, 2025.

If you have not visited the museum recently, we would encourage you to come and view all the new aircraft, restored aircraft, displays, and memorabilia. Special thanks go to Marvin Juhl in his previous position as Procurement Officer for bringing in additional aircraft, and to Jack Bradford and our Curator Staff for all the display improvements. Our Gift Shop has been remodeled with wider aisles, and a varied selection of added items.

The museum hosted a two-day open house in November to honor our Veterans. The turnout was especially good, and the kids enjoyed the bounce house. Several military support organizations participated, and we received a letter of appreciation from Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) for our support. The numerous non-perishable food donations we collected have been provided to local food banks and other needed organizations.

We have a new Events Coordinator, Daniele Snyder. Daniele comes to us with a wealth of experience and has been organizing the 2024 events as well as the upcoming 2025 events.

Our annual Holiday Dinner for Members and Volunteers was an outstanding event. Jolene Clarke catered the event, Tracy Bohrmann set up her magnificent town display, and our volunteers did a splendid job with the decorations. Jim Grammatico brought in 4 tall propane heaters and then he canvassed the local area for multiple dinner certificates. Adding these to the attendees who brought in gifts to exchange, provided for numerous door prizes in addition to a large 50-50 drawing. The weather cooperated and a good night was had by all.

(continued pg 5)

(continued from pg 4)

Our 2025 Space Coast Warbird AirShow had to be cancelled when the airport announced that they would be resurfacing runway 18-36 during our planned show dates. The event has now been moved to the last weekend in March, 2026. Martin and Terri Pring represented the VAC at ICAS in Las Vegas in December. Working long hours each day, they were able to get a great jump-start on the 2026 show. We plan to start hosting an air show planning meeting next May.

We are still working on our Fly-In / Drive-In Breakfast, looking for a caterer who can provide the venue and looking at the possibility of hosting the event in-house with our volunteers. In either case, we cannot resume the breakfast until the Event Center construction is complete.

In addition to our normal operations, we continue to play host to some private events, including a major commercial company who wants to use the entire museum as a venue. In order to host this large event, the museum will be closed to the public March 22-25th, for which, we are being well compensated... More details on this later.

Best wishes for everyone to have a safe and healthy new year.

Bob Boswell, Commander
Email: Commander@valiantaircommand.com
(321) 268-1941



Annual Holiday Dinner for Volunteers and Members



Executive Officer's Report

Valiant Air Command hopes all had a blessed Christmas and that everyone kept safe in bringing in the New Year 2025. Much happened in 2024 and was well done by our volunteers in making 2024 a successful year. VAC made great accomplishments and enjoyed success throughout the year, which was only made possible by our volunteers and members. A big HUGE THANK YOU goes out to all. Now we must look ahead to meet our 2025 goals. This will require more volunteers who have visions and are willing to see and foster the new accomplishments needed as we grow. We have much to look forward to. In that vein, let's discuss what a volunteer is and what they are needed to do.

VOLUNTEER - To offer to do something that you do not have to do, often without having been asked to do it and/or without expecting payment.

Being a volunteer means that you are *offering* something - something that is not required nor an obligation. It's an elective and free-choice act of an individual freely giving time and labor.

What does it mean to become a volunteer?

Volunteering is the act of rendering selfless service to a cause. Oftentimes, it is about giving time to a good cause, specifically in helping an organization or an individual not related to you. People who engage in this type of activity are known as volunteers. Volunteers are the glue that holds together an activity or organization's objective outcome. Volunteering allows you to connect to the work force in helping make it a better workplace. Even helping out with the smallest task can make a real difference to the outcome.

Sometimes it happens that volunteers quit because they just aren't interested in what they are doing. It might be that they don't see their impact on the mission as necessary or important, or they may not find meaning in their work. This could lead to them quitting, or worse yet, "dragging" others down in their performance. A solution to this conundrum could be as simple as offering more support and/or training. Sometimes it takes people a little longer to learn new skills. If the volunteer is struggling with their role, they might need more support, or perhaps a change to their tasks.

The golden rule to volunteering is that if you commit to do something - do it. Your ability to fulfill a commitment doesn't just reflect on you; it also reflects upon the organization you are volunteering for. Great volunteers remain professional in all situations. Respect other people's privacy and boundaries. Communicate with others in an open and respectful way. Be responsible and accountable in the way you carry out your role.

Do volunteers need management?

Yes, volunteers need some form of structure and focus. Good volunteer management involves leading, involving, and engaging.

Can anyone manage volunteers?

Yes, but not everyone can manage volunteers well. Managing volunteers requires patience, interpersonal skills, endurance and resiliency, because volunteers work for a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Clear communication, understanding of roles and responsibilities, providing regular updates, showing appreciation, and soliciting feedback are essential for effective volunteer management.

Marvin Juhl, Executive Officer

Email: ExecutiveOfficer@valiantaircommand.com

(321) 268-1941 ext. 4104

Finance Officer's Report



We are in the final push to get the Event Hangar built and we anticipate around April or May 2025 for opening. We need your help to get this project to completion. This project is stretching the VAC to maximum effort and financial resources of the organization; however, the additional revenue stream will be a much-needed help to the VAC bottom line. Museums in general have razor thin margins, and aviation museums



Event Center under construction

even more so. The need to add revenue lines is critical to our growth into 2025. While we have had many events in the past, we have also lost many event opportunities to environmental factors such as the heat and cold, and general conditions of our regular aircraft hangers. The dedicated Event Hangar will alleviate these issues and add to our ability to host many more events.

While the Board of Directors has been working tirelessly to improve the VAC throughout the year, we cannot fully do our jobs without the help of our members and volunteers. We need your support and commitment to keep the VAC strong and vital.

Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Tracy Bohrmann, Finance Director
Email: FinanceDirector@valiantaircommand.com
(321) 268-1941

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 1	New Years Day Museum Closed.
Jan 14	VAC BOD Meeting 12pm @ Boardroom / Teams meeting
Feb 11	VAC BOD Meeting 12pm @ Boardroom / Teams meeting
Mar 11	VAC BOD Meeting 12pm @ Boardroom / Teams meeting
Mar 22 - 25	Private Event Museum Closed



Procurement Officer's Report

Welcome to the 4th Quarter 2024 UnScramble, and my first one as Procurement Officer. I guess I should introduce myself first, for those of you who haven't seen me around on a weekend or at a special event.

My name is Martin Pring. Originally from the UK, I emigrated over here in 2012, but the love and admiration for Valiant Air Command, Inc. started in March of 2007, when I visited the museum as part of a visit to my now wife. We visited the museum with the sole objective of visiting the F-14 Tomcat. However, fate would have it that the day we visited the museum, it was during prep for the airshow weekend, which meant that the aircraft hangars were empty. That being said, there was one of the Viper Demo East F-16s on the museum's ramp during that time, parked where the Vietnam Hangar sits now.



Viper East F-16 demonstration jet

While my love for the Valiant Air Command, Inc. goes back to 2007, my love of aviation goes back even further to when I was a kid growing up with a father who was in the Royal Air Force. One of my fondest memories is sitting in the cockpit of a C-130 Hercules, riding along with a crew on one of their "Friends and Family Day" events, looking outside over the English countryside during low level flight. Ever since then, my love of aviation only grew, and I have been lucky enough to attend many airshows and museums around the world.

Once I emigrated to the U.S. in 2012 and could start to volunteer time, I began volunteering with the late Larry Champion on working as a docent. I then moved to working with him on the restoration of the Canberra, and not long after that, our former Commander Norm Daniels asked me to assist him with working on the F-105 Thunderchief, helping with the stripping of that aircraft. Once my love of photography and social media became noticed, our Personnel Officer Richard Jones asked me to take on the management of the website and the museum's social media accounts. It seemed a natural progression from there to join the board as Procurement Officer.

This finally leads into the actual procurement section of this article. In October, we received our latest aircraft exhibit – the MH-53 Sea Dragon from HM-12 Sea Dragons – which was quite an experience for the museum, as the last aircraft to arrive under its own power is believed to be the Tomcat when it was procured in the 1990's. The HM-12 crew enjoyed their time working with us to prepare the aircraft for the display in the museum, answering questions about the aircraft and the role it played for the Navy. The crew stated that it was a bittersweet moment to "sunset" the aircraft, as their whole squadron is being "sunsetting" next year with the decommissioning of the MH-53 fleet.

The arrival generated a lot of media attention and excitement. You can catch the highlights on our YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu4Df1GJBhg> .



MH-53 Sea Dragon at sunset

(continued pg 9)

(continued from pg 8)



**Valiant Air Command, Inc booth at
ICAS in Las Vegas, NV**

So, what's next for the Valiant Air Command? At the beginning of December, Terri Pring and I visited Las Vegas for the annual ICAS convention (International Council of Air Shows), where there was a lot of interest in the museum location, our flagship *Tico Belle*, and our airshow in general. We are working with those interested parties for all aspects of the engagement we received or inquired about during the week in Vegas, and we are hopeful that this will continue to generate both interest and income for the museum.

We have a number of aircraft offers from the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy, which we have unfortunately had to pass on due to a number of factors, such as lack of space, being a duplicate of an aircraft type we already have in our collection, or to be completely honest, have little "interest" with our visitors, such as private jets being used as a training airframe. But conversations continue in hopes of finding the next piece of aviation history to join the VAC family.

As we continually look to improve, keep an eye out in your volunteer email for a note from me where I will go deeper into the ideas I have for how we can make your experience of volunteering with us at the Valiant Air Command, Inc better in the future. Most importantly, I would like to hear YOUR input in how I can help you. Thank you again for not only volunteering your time, but your loved one's time while you at the museum! Happy Holidays to everyone and I look forward to your feedback!

Martin Pring, Procurement Director
Email: martin.pring@valiantaircommand.com
(321) 268-1941 ext. 4109

PR Officer's Report



We have been invited to set up a display table at Patrick SFB ITT for a day in January. The museum has been featured in 4 or 5 articles in Florida Today and Hometown News.

We have signed a contract with Space Coast Fun Guide for an advertisement on their inside cover.

We have established a new partnership with WMMB FM to advertise as soon as funding becomes available.

I represented the museum at a Starr Event for hospitality workers.

The Toronto Sun visited the museum and will be writing an article about us.

The Bradenton Times included our museum in an article about must-see attractions on the Space Coast.

Our brochure for the new events hangar is complete and has been sent to the printer.

Our new rack cards are printed and available. They are being distributed to hotels, rest stops, and other tourist destinations.

David Shores, PR Director
Email: PR@valiantaircommand.com
(321) 268-1941 ext. 4106

Donations

Accepted



Home of the
Jico Belle

WWW.VALIANTAIRCOMMAND.COM

**KEEP HER
FLYING**

OUR WWII COMBAT VETERAN
C-47 FLIES ON DONATIONS





S.T.E.M. Coordinator's Report

By Louis M. DePaemelaere

The Valiant Radials S.T.E.M. program has kicked off the 2024-2025 session with unparalleled enthusiasm! Launched in September and running through May 2025, this year promises to deliver an exceptional learning experience. We're proud to welcome back several returning students, alongside a strong group of new members eager to dive into this incredible journey.

Our program has featured an impressive lineup of speakers who have engaged and inspired our students. We started strong with one of our top simulator instructors, who expertly unraveled the principles of aerodynamics that make flight possible. On that very day, students had the thrilling opportunity to get hands-on with the museum's Beechcraft T-34 Mentor, participating in a preflight check—an experience they won't soon forget!

Cindy Ramsey from our restoration shop delivered a powerful presentation about her remarkable career as a technician and inspector of Boeing 757 engines, leaving everyone inspired by her expertise and dedication.

In December, we hosted Dwayne Waters, president of the Merritt Island EAA Chapter 724, who motivated our students by introducing the EAA Young Eagles program and outlining valuable scholarship opportunities for future pilots.



S.T.E.M. Students and crew in front of the MH-53 Sea Dragon

The pinnacle of this quarter was undoubtedly the visit from a U.S. Navy pilot flying the Sikorsky MH-53E Sea Dragon. Our students were not only impressed by the aircraft but also engaged in meaningful discussions, asking thought-provoking questions that showcased their keen interest.

Looking ahead, we are excited to roll up our sleeves and tackle hands-on projects in the upcoming quarter. The past quarter flew by in the best way possible, proving to be incredibly productive and informative for all involved. We still have open spots in our class and are ready to welcome passionate new students eager to join us on this thrilling adventure. Don't wait—let's explore the exciting world of aviation and engineering together!



The final flight crew of the MH-53 Sea Dragon

Webmaster's Report

By Martin Pring



Over the past 90 days, our online presence has grown significantly, reflecting the enthusiasm for our mission and exhibits. Here's a snapshot of our progress:

Website Engagement Highlights

Our website remains a hub for aviation enthusiasts worldwide:

Total Visits:

- ◇ 17,941 (up from 17,131), with 13,936 unique visitors (up from 13,191).

Top Locations:

- ◇ United States: 14,515 (↑ from 13,850)
- ◇ Canada: 223 (↑ from 162)
- ◇ Australia: 83 (new entry)

Visitor Sources:

- ◇ Google Organic Search: 8,811
- ◇ Direct Traffic: 5,480
- ◇ Facebook Organic: 1,552 (↑ from 478)

Device Usage:

- ◇ Mobile: 65%
- ◇ Desktop: 32%

Traffic peaks on weekends, particularly from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, with November 9th seeing a record 410 visitors.

Social Media Performance

Our social media remains a strong engagement platform:

Last 30 Days:

- ◇ Post Reach: 82,693 (↑ from 42,892)
- ◇ Post Engagement: 5,599

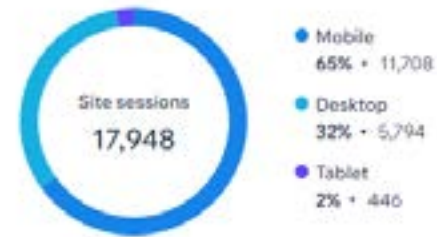
October Highlight (MH-53 Arrival):

- ◇ Post Reach: 163,700
- ◇ Post Engagement: 7,100

Over the last 90 days, 94% of engagement has been organic, with minimal paid advertising.



Sessions by device



[See Full Report](#)

Avg. sessions by day



[See Full Report](#)

(continued pg 13)

(continued from pg 12)

Looking Ahead to 2025

As exciting as 2024 has been, there is potential for 2025 to see even more growth.

Google Ad Grant Secured:

- ◆ Monthly ad credit will promote our website and web shop.

Web Shop Launch:

- ◆ Hosted on Shopify, our shop will offer patches, shirts, and hats to U.S. customers initially, with plans for expansion. Launch is planned for early 2025.

Thank you for your continued support as we reach new heights together. Stay tuned for more updates!

Martin Pring, Webmaster and Social Media Administrator
Email: martin.pring@valiantaircommand.com
(321) 223-1615

Logic Puzzle

	F-14	MH-53	C-47	Canberra	OV-1	Main Hangar	Vietnam Hangar	Main Ramp	Back Ramp	Taxiway	8 AM	9 AM	10:30 AM	11 AM	Noon	
Marvin																
Charlie																
Hawk																
Tom																
Martin																
8 AM																
9 AM																
10:30 AM																
11 AM																
Noon																
Main Hangar																
Vietnam Hangar																
Main Ramp																
Back Ramp																
Taxiway																

It's a Saturday morning at Valiant Air Command, Inc., and aircraft need to be moved for an event. Marvin, Charlie, Hawk, Tom, and Martin arrive at different times throughout the morning, each volunteer moving one aircraft to a different location. Match each volunteer to their arrival time, the aircraft they moved, and the location they moved it to.

1. The volunteer moving the F-14 arrived earlier than the volunteer who parked their aircraft on the Back Ramp.
2. Neither Charlie nor the volunteer who moved the OV-1 parked their aircraft in the Main Hangar.
3. Tom did not park his aircraft in the Vietnam Hangar.
4. The C-47 was parked last on the taxiway.
5. Of Martin and the volunteer who arrived first, one moved the MH-53 and the other parked their aircraft in the Vietnam Hangar.
6. The first aircraft that was moved was not a jet.
7. The aircraft parked in the Vietnam Hangar and on the Back Ramp did not have prop or rotor blades.
8. The volunteer who moved the OV-1 was the only person to not arrive at the top of the hour.
9. Marvin and Martin both arrived earlier enough to watch at least 3 other volunteers move aircraft.
10. Neither Tom nor the volunteer who parked their aircraft on the Main Ramp moved a jet.

HOW TO SOLVE THIS PUZZLE:

1. Read the introduction and scan the clues. You can work through the clues in order, but the best approach is to attack the simplest clues first.
2. Eliminate pairs you know aren't true with a - , and pencil in pairs you know are related with a + .
3. Every item is matched to one, and only one, other item in each category, and no two items in a category will ever be matched to the same item in another category.
4. Some clues will need to be revisited once you have filled out more information in the grid. Keep working through them logically until you have completed the puzzle.

Curator's Corner

By Jack Bradford



Historic Cape Canaveral Logistical Trailer Grumman sign

A historic Grumman “meatball” sign was recently donated to the museum by Bob ZiBerna and William Waldron, both of whom worked in the space program. The sign was originally part of a logistical trailer at Cape Canaveral during the pivotal 1960s space race. Over the years, both men kept the sign, always intending to donate it to a museum. This September, they fulfilled that intention, and the sign now hangs proudly above the docent station in our main lobby. You can read more about the fascinating journey of the sign before its arrival at our museum through this Viera Voice News link: https://www.vieravoice.com/current_issue/senior_life/senior-life-october-2024/article_f2507bbc-802c-11ef-8065-2328201ad7be.html

Retired aeronautical engineer and modeler Richard Staszek attended our Open House on Saturday, November 9th. He brought a portion of his extensive experimental model aircraft collection, which was displayed in front of the XP-82 in the Vietnam Hangar.

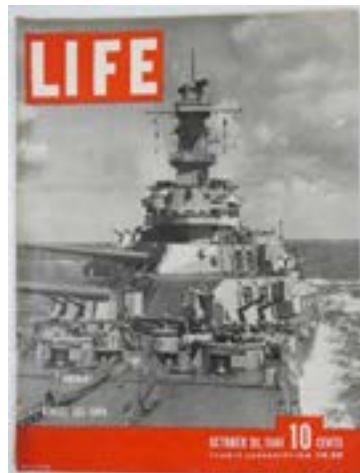
Throughout the day, he was available to provide valuable background information about his unique collection to visiting guests.

During the Open House weekend event, the curator staff set up two tables to sell excess aircraft models and wall paintings from our collection. Sales were successful, with nearly 80% of both the models and wall paintings purchased by attending guests.

An inventory spreadsheet has been created to catalog all magazine periodicals currently in the museum’s possession. Cover and index page photos were taken for each of these periodicals for digital archiving and future reference purposes. The collection includes 63 volumes of Life magazines from 1943 through 1945, 3 volumes of Life magazines from 1964, 3 volumes of Look magazines from 1944, 1 volume of Click magazine from 1944, and 1 volume of Cosmopolitan magazine from 1944. Additionally, the collection contains various military magazines from the 1940s. Most of these periodicals are in very good condition.



Richard Staszek at VAC Open House



Oct 1944 Life magazine (part of VAC collection)

An ongoing effort throughout the 4th quarter of 2024 has focused on organizing and eventually inventorying artifacts currently stored in the library storage area of the museum. All flight vests and G-suits in our possession, previously stored in various cabinets and boxes throughout the museum, have now been gathered, sorted by type, and stored in labeled containers in the library storage area for easy access. The same collection and organization process has been applied to other items, such as duffle bags, military caps, flight helmets, boots, and uniforms.

Newly donated items from LCDR Stockton Smith’s military career have been added to his dedicated display near the F-14 in the main hangar. These items include Top Gun and 1,000-hour F-14 flight time plaques.

(continued pg 15)

(continued from pg 14)

Many people may not realize that the museum houses an extensive collection of historical communications and navigational equipment displayed along the back wall of the main hangar. This collection is currently undergoing updates. Research has been conducted, and general description labels have been created to accompany much of this equipment, providing guests with valuable background information that was previously missing.

Prominent pieces in the display include an RAF WWII-era T1154 Transmitter, used on Lancaster Bombers, and an APT-9 Airborne Radar Jamming Transmitter, which was commonly employed on B-47E Stratojet Bombers.



Valiant Air Command Communications & Navigational Equipment Display in the Main Hangar

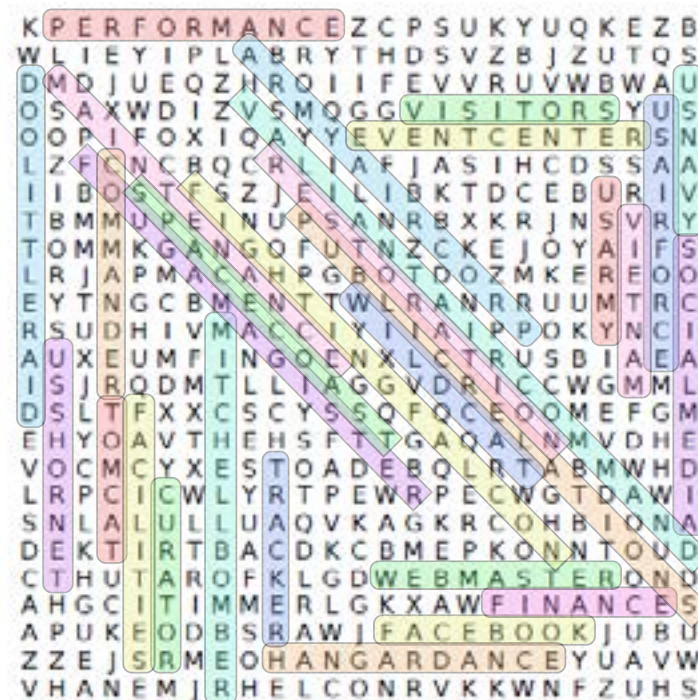


1929 Commemorative Cleveland Air Races Coin

Over the summer, an extensive sorting process was undertaken for all medals, insignias, chevrons, ribbons, pins, and other small memorabilia in the museum's collection. These items were categorized by service and era and stored in labeled bags and containers, making them easy to identify and access for future displays. During this process, several valuable items were discovered, including a rare commemorative coin from the 1929 National Air Races in Cleveland. This event marked the first of many memorable National Air Races held at the Cleveland Municipal Airport.

An Ohio Magazine article on the history of the Cleveland Air Races can be found at the following link: <https://www.ohiomagazine.com/ohio-life/article/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-cleveland-air-races>

Quarter 3 Word Search Solution



"Another Flight of the Intruder" (Part 2)

By CAPT Don Fraser, USN (ret)

* For the first part of this story, please refer to the Quarter 3 UnScramble of 2024. *

The A-6A Intruder's state-of-the-art bombing system was an excellent one when it worked, but when a system failure occurred (as it did frequently following a catapult shot), old fashioned dive bombing became the primary delivery method. Typically, we would fly from Yankee Station across South Vietnam near the DMZ, and once over Laos turn north to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail near Ban Karai pass or Mu Gia pass. Our flight of two Intruders would meet an Air Force forward air controller (FAC) who would locate and mark targets in the area for us to strike. Combat rules suggested only two dive bombing attacks should be made on any one target. (Since the Rockeyes were reserved for only high-value targets, we were expected to bring them back to the ship.) On our second dive bombing pass, delivering the remaining Mark 82s, our right engine fire warning light began to flash — our "bad day" was underway.

Following emergency procedures, Evan shut down the right engine. We still had a long way to go to get back to the ship. As we were homeward bound, however, key aircraft systems began to fail, and I began what seemed like a page check of every emergency procedure in the book. Later, we would learn a simple engine part was at the heart of all the failures — a V-band clamp connecting high-pressure lines that channeled extremely hot engine gasses. When that part failed, a fire warning light would illuminate, but simply shutting down the affected engine did not prevent very hot 12th stage bleed air from the remaining engine from burning up the aircraft's internal components. (Of course, shutting down both engines would solve that problem, but create a situation even more hazardous to your health.)

With the assistance of our lead, the squadron skipper, the decision was made to proceed to the huge US air base at Da Nang and land there, rather than attempt to trap aboard Ranger. Declaring an emergency did get us some priority into Da Nang, but you might not be the only returning aircraft with a problem.

Any positive feeling of this emergency finally coming to an end was dashed while trying to complete the landing checklist. Only the nose gear came down and all attempts to drop the main gear failed. Not wanting to scrape the Rockeye ordnance on their runway and risk having the 247 bomblets in each pod scattered all over the base, we were directed to fly out over the Gulf of Tonkin and rid ourselves of that problem. Dispatching our unwanted ordnance was followed quickly by loss of radios as we turned back towards the beach to try to land with only a tail hook and nose gear. Soon we were south of Da Nang, lining up to land to the north. We were surprised when our skipper, as our lead, kept turning in front of us to try to move us to the left. Apparently, we had lined up on another runway at Marble Mountain, a helicopter base just a few clicks east and a bit south of Da Nang. The helo bubbas would certainly have been very surprised if a crippled and unannounced Intruder jet smashed into their base. A much better outcome was achieved when we visually sighted the Da Nang runway and lined up for a proper landing on a proper runway.

A superb single engine, nose-gear-only landing was executed by my pilot. As we skidded to a halt resting on one wingtip, we were met by scores of emergency vehicles and fire-fighting trucks, including folks who wanted to chop us out of the cockpit. Fortunately, the canopy was opened manually. We queried our rescuers as to why they were so anxious to get us out of the airplane. "Didn't you know you were on fire?" was the response. Perhaps we were too busy to notice.



Milestone 515 - No main gear for landing.

(continued pg 17)

(continued from pg 16)

If we had, an ejection would have been dictated by customary emergency procedures. When asked later why he didn't let us know we were on fire, our skipper informed us that the better choice was to be on fire and land as opposed to ejecting over the jungles around Da Nang where our safety was less than guaranteed.

One combat hop and one bad day... Could things possibly get worse?

We returned to the ship and got right back up on the horse by flying the next day. My junior officer bunkroom roommates wanted to know what I would do for an encore. Sadly, two days later, two of our squadron airplanes were lost in combat. Only one of four airmen was rescued. The first week of our first line period was a crushing welcome to the war. I still had my promised personal "very bad day" yet to come.

After a number of flights, we were trusted to fly some single-plane missions, typically working with an Air Force FAC, using visual dive bombing tactics. In our typical attack profile, a forty-degree dive would be initiated around 12,000 to 13,000 feet at an airspeed of 400 to 450 knots. Bombs away would be at 6,000 to 7,000 feet followed by a high "g" pullout to stay 3,500 feet above ground. Those parameters were designed to keep the aircraft above fire from small arms and 37mm anti-aircraft cannon, and to avoid shrapnel from our own bombs. My pilot chose a dive profile closer to that of a World War II Stuka — with a dive angle in excess of fifty degrees and airspeeds barely under 500 knots. This tactic required a higher "g" pull out. Since most lucrative targets were protected by anti-aircraft weapons, no more than two runs would be made on any single target.

On a lighter note, on a flight on Christmas Day 1969, I noticed flak tracers, usually red, had some green tracers as well. Perhaps the gunners were in a festive holiday mood. Sadly, on 2 January 1970 the squadron lost its third airplane to enemy fire, and SAR efforts were unsuccessful in recovering either crewman. That brought our squadron total to six downed aviators with only one successfully rescued.



Dave Rhode and Don Fraser on the Ranger flight deck — January 1970

During an in-port period in January 1970, one of my fellow B/Ns suffered a broken arm. To keep our sortie rate up, I was assigned to fly with his pilot. For what turned out to be a short period of time, I was racking up two combat hops a day. Life was good.

Laos essentially has two seasons — the wet monsoon season from May through September and a drier, but still humid, season from October through April. In February, the average temperature runs around 77 degrees Fahrenheit, with daytime highs at 86 degrees and night-time temperatures dipping to 68 degrees. The dry season brought much more traffic, and thus targets, to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Laos does not observe daylight savings time, so local time is always

Zulu time plus seven hours.

On 6 February 1970, on what was supposed to be my first of two flights of the day, LCDR Reese and I rendezvoused near the town of Tchepone with our FAC — call sign Nail 43. The FAC had several Navy planes lined up over targets along the trail. The A-6 was always better at fuel use than F-4 Phantoms or A-7 Corsair IIs, so we were used to being the last to get called in to strike. Although each plane would follow the rule of no more than two passes at a target, because we were "last man" in, we were actually making the eighth or tenth pass on a particular target. This tended to sharpen the aim of the anti-aircraft guns slinging lead skyward.

On this particular day, the enemy gunners made the score 1-0 in their favor as Milestone 516, with Pee Wee and me on board, had its left wing shot off just after bomb release. We were at around 7,000 feet and diving towards the ground at close to 500 knots. With one wing missing, our aircraft flipped inverted while rapidly hurtling towards the ground in what seemed to be a slow spin. I made one ICS (internal communication system) call to my pilot asking, "Are we gonna fly?" (To be continued...)



Visit our social media pages here!



Visit our website here!

- 1st Quarter** - Jan, Feb & Mar • Submission deadline - Mar 24th NL Published - April 1st
- 2nd Quarter** - April, May & June • Submission deadline - June 24th NL Published - June 30th
- 3rd Quarter** - July, Aug & Sept • Submission deadline - Sept 24th NL Published - Sept 30th
- 4th Quarter** - Oct, Nov & Dec • Submission deadline - Dec 22nd NL Published - Dec 31st

Editor: Terri Pring

Acknowledgements: Louise Kleba and Lorraine Juhl

Photo Credits: Marvin Juhl, Martin Pring, Terri Pring,
Christine Reynolds, Jack Bradford, Tim Jeror,
Larry Titchenal, CAPT Don Fraser USN (ret)

Please note: All submissions are subject to edit or omission.
Items submitted after the submission deadline will not be
published or will be published the next quarter if applicable.
The Editor reserves the right to not publish submitted items.