

# ATKRON 12 NEWSLETTER

# VA-12

## SQUADRON LINEAGE

1946 VBF-4  
1946 VF-2A  
1948 VF-12  
1955 VA-12

PUBLISHED BY THE  
VA-12 REUNION ASSOCIATION  
See CONTACT INFO Page 4

ALL ARE WELCOME TO VISIT

THE WORLD FAMOUS FLYING UBANGIS

AT OUR WEBSITE [WWW.VA12.COM](http://WWW.VA12.COM)



Volume XIV, Issue 1 April 2015

A4D-2 Skyhawk at MCAS Yuma, 1959

VA-12 IN 1955



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# UBANGI? UBETCHA!

## 2015 REUNION NEWS & NOTES

Yes, there will be a reunion. I know I scared some of you with my email regarding the low turn out a few weeks ago. Since that time several more of you have signed up. Not as many as I expected for a Florida location, but enough to still hold the event. The planned itinerary is as follows.

**Thursday Apr 9** Arrive Cocoa Beach, Ice Breaker 1700

**Friday Apr 10** Air Boat Ride Christmas, FL

**Saturday Apr 11** Valiant Air Museum, Titusville Day trip

**Reunion Banquet 1900**

**Sunday Apr 12** Kennedy Space Center

### REGISTERED ATTENDEES as of 2/17/15

Jerry & Doni Barnett  
Lynn & Ruth Card  
Joe & Carol Cassel  
Bill & Faith Doody  
Rod & Sara Dunlap  
Paul & Guest Englert  
Frank & Robbi Giaccone  
George Hinds & Carol Hagenau  
Bill & Lynn Heck  
Robert & Dottie Kaplan  
Joe & Kathy Kyle  
Mike Landers  
John Larch  
Jack MacBain  
Joe McFadden  
Art & Sue McHard  
Austin O'Brien  
Terry & Joan Nies  
Keith & Joanne Purzycki  
James Renfroe  
JD & Sandy Rogers  
Jerry Schwartz  
Jim Towe  
Bud White  
Ron & Darlene Wolfe

## ATTENTION!

Please, please, please send in your registration form and \$ before 3/8/15. The banquet requires 30 days notice on the number of attendees. I know I shouldn't have to say this, but local people, please don't plan on just dropping by. No walk-ons.

## TREASURY REPORT

Previous Balance	\$647.91
Dues/Reunion fees interest	1,572.00 .05
<b>SUB TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,219.96</b>
*Stamps	100.34
*Printing	235.01
<b>CURRENT EXPENSES</b>	<b>335.35</b>
<b>NEW BALANCE</b>	<b>\$1,864.61</b>

## NEWSLETTER NOTES

(Repeated from the last issue!)

John Larch and I have decided to reduce the number of Newsletters that we will create each year. We will plan on two, one in March or April and the other in September or October. In addition to emailing about 75% of them this will reduce our expenditures greatly. Therefore our annual dues structure will change. If you are in the minority and want your Newsletter mailed to you, those dues will be reduced to \$10.00 annually, if you receive your Newsletter digitally your dues will be whatever you feel you want to contribute.

## CUTLASS RECOLLECTIONS

I was at Cecil Field when the first F7U-3 was delivered to VF-12 in 1955. It has a nose wheel collapse on landing and we all thought OMG, what is this going to be like at sea! I was getting out and all I could think of was those poor Plane Captains. I see from your article it was never deployed at sea by VF... Changed to VA-12. Thank goodness! Some background on this clunker follows.

**Marty McCormick 53-55**

## OVERVIEW



Vought F7U-3 Cutlass BuNo 128463 on the ramp at Naval Air Station Jacksonville in June 1954.

The Vought F7U Cutlass was a United States Navy carrier-based jet fighter and fighter-bomber of the early Cold War era. It was a highly unusual, semi-tailless design, allegedly based on aerodynamic data and plans captured from the German Arado company at the end of World War 2, though Vought designers denied any link to the German research at the time. The F7U was the last aircraft designed by Rex Beisel, who was responsible for the first fighter ever designed specifically for the U.S. Navy, the Curtiss TS-1 of 1922.

Regarded as a radical departure from traditional aircraft design, the Cutlass suffered from numerous technical and handling problems throughout its short service career. The type was responsible for the deaths of four test pilots and 21 other U.S. Navy pilots. Over one quarter of all Cutlasses built were destroyed in accidents. The poor safety record was largely the result of advanced design built to apply new aerodynamic theories and insufficiently powered, unreliable engines.

Role	Navy multi-role fighter
Manufacturer	Chance Vought
First flight	29 September 1948
Introduction	July 1951

Retired	2 March 1959
Primary user	United States Navy
Produced	1948-1955
Number built	320

## DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT



The first F7U-1 launching from the carrier Midway in 1951

The Cutlass was Vought's entry to a U.S. Navy competition for a new carrier-capable day fighter, opened on 1 June 1945. Former Messerschmidt AG senior designer Waldemar Voigt, who supervised the development of numerous experimental jet fighters in Nazi Germany, contributed to its design with his experience in the development of the Messerschmidt P.1110 and P.1112 projects. The requirements were for an aircraft that was able to fly at 600 mph at 40,000 feet. The design featured broad chord, low aspect ratio swept wings, with twin wing-mounted tail fins either side of a short fuselage. The cockpit was situated well forward to provide good visibility for the pilot during aircraft carrier approaches. The design was given the company type number of V-346 and then the official designation of "F7U" when it was announced the winner for the competition.

Pitch and roll control was provided by elevons, though Vought called these surfaces "ailevators" at the time. Slats were fitted to the entire span of the leading edge. All controls were hydraulically powered. The very long nose landing gear strut required for high angle of attack takeoffs was rather weak, and a collapse could seriously jeopardize the pilot's safety. The F7U was also



largely let down by its underpowered Westinghouse J34 turbojets, an engine that some pilots liked to say “put out less heat than Westinghouse’s toasters”. Naval aviators called the F7U the “Gutless Cutlass” and/or the “Ensign Eliminator”, or in kinder moments, the “Praying Mantis”.

## OPERATIONAL HISTORY



Ramp strike of Vought F7U-3 Cutlass “412” of VF-124 on Hancock, 14 July 1955. LCdr Jay T. Alkire (XO of the VF-124 Stingarees” was killed in the crash, and several deck crew were injured.

Three prototypes were ordered in 1946, with the first example flying on 29 September 1948, piloted by Vought’s Chief Test Pilot Robert Baker. The maiden flight took place from Naval Air Station Patuxent River and was not without its problems. During testing one of the prototypes reached a maximum speed of 625 mph (1,058 km/h).

Production orders were placed for the F7U-1 in a specification very close to the prototypes, and further developed F7U-2 and FyU-3 versions with more powerful engines. Because of development problems with the powerplant, however, the F7U-2 would never be built, while the F7U-3 would incorporate many refinements suggested by the tests of the -1. The first 16 F7U-3’s had non-afterburning Allison J35-29 engines. The -3, with its Westinghouse J46-WE-8B turbojets, would eventually become the definitive production version, with 288 aircraft equipping 13 U.S. Navy squadrons. Further development stopped once the Vought F8U Crusader flew.

The F7U’s performance suffered due to a lack of sufficient engine thrust; consequently, its carrier landing and takeoff performance was notoriously poor. The J35 was known to flame out in rain, a very serious fault.

The first fleet squadron to receive F7Us was Fighter Squadron 81 (VF-81) in April 1954; the last with Cutlasses was Attack Squadron 66 (VA-66) in November 1957. Few squadrons made deployments with the type, and most “beached” them ashore during parts of the cruise owing to operating difficulties. Those units known to have taken the type to sea were:

VF-124, [USS Hancock \(CVA-19\)](#), Aug 1955 – Mar 1956;  
VF-81, [USS Ticonderoga \(CVA-14\)](#), Nov 1955 – Aug 1956;  
VA-86, [USS Forrestal \(CVA-59\)](#), Jan – Mar 1956  
Shakedown Cruise;  
VA-83, [USS Intrepid \(CVA-11\)](#), Mar – Sep 1956;  
VA-116, [USS Hancock \(CVA-19\)](#), Apr - Sep 1957;  
VA-151, [USS Lexington \(CVA-16\)](#), May - Dec 1956;  
VA-212, [USS Bon Homme Richard \(CVA-31\)](#), Aug 1956 – Feb 1957  
Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 4 (VX-4), [USS Shangri-La \(CVA-38\)](#) and [USS Lexington \(CVA-16\)](#)

## BLUE ANGELS

The Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, flew two F7U-1 Cutlasses (BuNos 124426 and 124427) as a side demonstration during their 1953 show season in an effort to promote the new aircraft, but did not use them as part of their regular formation demonstration. Both the pilots and the ground crews found the aircraft generally unsatisfactory, and it was apparent the type was still experiencing multiple teething troubles.

During the Blue Angels’ first airshow appearance of 1953, pilot Lt Edward “Whitey” Feightner, the former program manager for the F7U, experienced a total loss of hydraulics on a full afterburner takeoff and steep climb. While trying to gain enough altitude for ejection he was able to stay with the aircraft until the backup system came on. He clipped trees on the end of the runway, much to the excitement of the crowd. Later, while travelling to an airshow at Naval Air Station Glenview in Chicago, Illinois, Blue Angel pilot Lt Harding MacKnight experienced an engine flameout in his Cutlass, forcing him to make an

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emergency landing as NAS Glenview. Traveling with him, Lt Feightner was redirected to make his landing at Chicago's former Orchard Airpark, which had been expanded and renamed O'Hare Airport. The runway had just been completed and was covered with peach baskets to prevent aircraft from landing until it was opened. Lt Feightner was told to ignore the baskets and land on the new runway. As a result, Lt Feightner's F7U became the first aircraft to land on the new runway for Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

Following these incidents, the two Cutlasses were deemed unsuitable for demonstration flying and were flown to Naval Air Station Memphis, Tennessee, where they were abandoned to become aircraft maintenance instructional airframes for the Naval Technical Training Center.

(Wikipedia info submitted by *Marty McCormick 53-55*)

## MY FIRST NIGHT HOP

I was in Pensacola and fairly well along in my flight training. I was also looking forward to my first night flight.

The program that evening was for you to take one flight with an instructor and if he approved you would then fly the second hop solo. I went through as an officer having been commissioned an Ensign at OCS in Newport RI. So I made sure I had dinner at the BOQ and arrived at the field a little late – as the briefing had already started. My instructor informed me he wanted to get home early so “hurry up at the end of the briefing”. I hurriedly changed to flight suit and ran to the plane. Instructor was already in – it was then I realized I did not have 2 back packs. The SNJ (training plane) was not designed for a pilot 5'8" and I needed back packs to push me forward in the seat so that I could reach the rudder pedal/brakes. I needed time – I asked the instructor if the plane checked – “Yes except the oil. “Just get in.” I checked the oil it was full – “We need oil” I replied. He cursed.

I said to the plane captain get up there with an oil can and make like your putting oil in the tank and I ran like hell for the hanger to get the pack backs. As I neared the plane there was the sailor with an

oil can looking like he was putting oil in the tank. (I later got him a bottle of Scotch).

We taxied out and as I advanced the throttle to take off I noticed flames coming out of the exhaust and pulled back the throttle. “What are you doing” – “I saw flames sir”. “You idiot that's normal”. Somehow I completed the flight. He cleared me for a solo flight with the final words “Go kill yourself” and got out of the plane.

I took off and got into the pattern of flying around the field with the other pilots. In the pattern were also students with instructors.

It was a beautiful clear night and all was silent until one student thinking he was on intercom broadcasted “Sir I am all fucked up”. Immediately the Tower replied “Aircraft that made that last transmission please identify yourself”.

Total silence – then another voice said “He ain't that fucked up”.

*Bill Doody 55-58*

## VA-12 THE SECOND TIME AROUND?

It has come as a sort of shock to hear from a shipmate, about a short-lived attempt to reestablish VA-12 in 1987 and 1988.

### THE FIRST TIME AROUND

VA-12, then flying the A-7E Corsair II, was dis-established in October 1986 when a large part of the A-7E presence in fleet squadrons was subjected to a “draw-down”, dove-tailing with the introduction of the F-18 Hornet.

There were no real efforts to produce a new model of the light attack A-7 for U.S. forces. But there was a move to upgrade the medium attack A-6 Intruder, the latest model being the A-6E, with an A-6F model. 5 prototypes of the –F model were produced and one of them actually flew.

### VA-12 REESTABLISHED IN 1987

Apparently, at least one squadron was stood back up, in anticipation that the A-6F would be accepted by the Navy and brought into fleet service. This reestablishment was at NAS Oceana, in 1987. There may have been more squadrons involved but this is unknown at present.



### FROM A SHIPMATE WHO WAS THERE

*“John, in response to your inquiry of VA-12 A-6F squadron, I am hoping this e-mail can shed some light on it. I originally served in VA-65 aboard the Eisenhower from 80-83 in CVW-7, which VA-12 was a part of. I came back in to the NAVY in 1987. I was offered "New Construction Duty " while in NAVET training in Orlando. I made it through their screening process and was told by the detailer I was going to VA-12. I soon learned that although the VA-12 A -7 unit was disestablished, a new squadron was being formed for the A-6F at NAS Oceana. I checked in to VA-12 around September, met the Skipper, and was told I would be TAD to VA-42 AT Shop since we did not have any planes. The only shop VA-12 had was a tool crib. Every day we would have quarters with VA-12 and then go to our respective TAD stations and wait on word from the top when we were getting our planes. Then one day in December I went upstairs to our Ready Room only to find a black wreath on the door with big bold letters reading " R.I.P VA12". The skipper held our last quarters and let us know that Congress would not be funding the*

*A-6F program and we would all be given new orders. It's too bad. We even adopted the original Black and Red colors and the skull and lips. Hope this helps with your question.”*

**Gary StDenis 80-83**

### A-6F NOT PURCHASED

The A-6F and the F-18 were essentially competing for the same role. During 1988 the decision was made that the A-6F model would not be produced. The Navy instead began to concentrate on a new

### ON THE COVER DOUGLAS A4D-1 & 2 SKYHAWK

The Skyhawk was designed by Douglas Aircraft's Ed Heinemann in response to a US Navy call for a jet-powered attack aircraft to replace the older Douglas AD (A-1) Skyraider. Heinemann opted for a design that would minimize its size, weight, and complexity. The result was an aircraft that weighed only half of the Navy's weight specification.

	A-1 Skyraider	A4D-1 Skyhawk
Engine	(1) Wright R3350-26WA Radial 2,700 Lb/Ft Thrust	(1) Pratt & Whitney J52-P8A Turbojet 9,300 Lb/Ft Thrust
Max Weight	25,000 Lbs	24,500 Lbs
Max Speed	322 MPH	673 MPH
Max Altitude	28,500 Ft.	42,250 Ft.
Max Range	1,316 Miles	2,000 Miles
Rate of Climb	2,850 Ft/Min	8,440 Ft/Min



**VA-12's EARLY HISTORY WITH THE A4:** VA-12 transitioned from the unfortunate F-7U Cutlass to the new A4D-1 Skyhawk in April 1957 and then to the upgraded A4D-2 in January 1958. Having never deployed with the F-7U Cutlass, after a long period ashore of over 3 years VA-12 embarked in CVA-59 Forrestal on a 6 month Med Cruise in September 1958 as part of Air Wing 10. In 1960 two short cruises were made on CVA-38 Shangri-La; in September for two months to the North Atlantic, and two weeks in November to the Caribbean.

aircraft, the stealth Advanced Tactical Aircraft (ATA) A-12 Avenger II.

In the end the Navy pursued the doomed A-12 Avenger for a future attack requirement and the A-6F was sent packing. At this time, the one known squadron stood up for incorporation into A-6F squadrons, VA-12, was once again dis-



established. The F-18 was modified to fill the role that this –F model aircraft was to have played. And the A-12 project itself was officially cancelled in 1991. But this is shrouded in a black wall of silence and mystery.

After cancellation of the A-12, the same A-6E upgrade package that created the A-6F was once again offered minus new more powerful motors, as the A-6G, but by this time the entire A-6 program has gotten a bad reputation for airframe cracks and huge maintenance costs. Plus, its subsonic speed was not ideal for the Navy requirements of the day.

### **MORE FROM GARY...**

*“As a matter of fact I have been to the VA-12 website. Very nice layout. So, to answer your questions: I do not remember who the CO or XO were. Time has robbed me of my former sharp memory. I believe the number of men (officers and*

*enlisted) were average A-6 squadron size. As far as I know, VA-12 was the only squadron waiting on the new Intruder. As for my Navy history, I left VA-65 in August 1983 but stayed in the reserves. After re-enlisting (in 1987), I was chosen by the detailer for new construction duty. Then you have to go through a very strict screening process involving legal, financial and medical clearances. When I found out that VA-12 was never going to be commissioned, I was given new orders to AIMD ARN-84/118 Tacan school at Oceana. From there I was assigned to Sea-Op-Det with CVW-17 aboard the Saratoga. I would much rather have continued my duty at O level working on the A-6 but it wasn't meant to be. I will be going through my old Navy records in hopes of finding out who the Skipper of 12 was.”*

**Gary StDenis 80-83**



A4D-2 Skyhawks being loaded aboard CVA-38 Shangri La in the early 1960's.



A4D-2 of VA-12 during training workups on-board CV-61 USS Ranger.



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