

# ATKRON 12 NEWSLETTER

## VA-12

PUBLISHED BY THE  
VA-12 REUNION ASSOCIATION

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A4D-2, Launching from CVA-59 Forrestal, 1959

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## 2012 REUNION

Here we go again, looks like it is time to make ready for our next reunion. This time we will be mustering in Charleston, SC a weekend in October 2012. The exact date is TBD. One of our members (Frank "Geno" Giaccone) and his lovely bride (Robbie) will be adventuring to the site in early August to examine several facilities and make a recommendation of the most appropriate accommodations to host our reunion. They will also spend some time reviewing sites of interest and will be instrumental in establishing our itinerary for next year. By the next newsletter we expect to be able to include a registration form for potential attendees to secure a place on the 2012 Attack Squadron Twelve Reunion Roster. In addition we will most likely post the information on our website as soon as it is confirmed. Keep a sharp watch.

### Warning

If you happen to see these two Ubangi's together run for cover. Mischief is afoot.....at the very least.



"Miami" Mike Landers and Gary "goddamn" Hall

### Comments from Bill Doody

Read the newsletter (Issue 10-1. Ed.) over breakfast and as always, enjoyed it.

The picture on the cover sent me to my log book and was happy to see that I had flown that Cutlass numerous times; since we had the plane in the squadron from February '56 to May '57. I had first flown it in March 1956.

The picture on the last page was a fond memory as well - I could recognize Lt Daryl May and Lucia Fleming standing under the plane. Lucia, a native of Jacksonville, was married to Ltjg Charley Fleming. As it turns out Charley was the pilot who flew the Cutlass featured on the cover to Willow Grove. Charley and I were best men at our mutual weddings, his in Jacksonville and mine in Wellesley

## 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.

Mass. He was a very successful Patent Attorney in Chicago and unfortunately I attended his burial service at Arlington National Cemetery last year.

I flew the last squadron F7U-3 Cutlass ( 129685) to NAS South Weymouth in Mass on May 9th '57. On my way back to Jacksonville I caused some concern

as I boarded a United Flight at Logan in Boston because I insisted on bringing my parachute on board with me.

The Cutlass became a sign at the entrance to NAS South Weymouth and was eventually sold to a private collector.

As you are aware the Cutlass was banned from Carrier flying after numerous accidents at sea and a poor maintenance record. We were thrilled to get the brand new A4D Skyhawk in June and taking it aboard the USS Ranger (CVA 61) in November of '57. (From a subsequent memo) The best remark about the Cutlass I read was the report of the Navy F7U-3 test pilot who wrote about the Westinghouse engines "this company's toaster is more powerful than those engines".

However you are correct in surmising that once airborne it was a great plan to fly and a very good rocket and bombing platform. The cockpit was very roomy and one felt that you were in a Cadillac long before you could afford one. The surprising thing is that even though we had our troubles keeping the Cutlass in an up status the morale of the squadron was high.

I do plan on being in Charleston, it is a great town  
Regards, Bill Doody '55-'58

## Veteran to Veteran

When a Veteran leaves the 'job' and retires to a better life, many are jealous, some are pleased, and others, who may have already retired, wonder if he knows what he is leaving behind, because we already know.

1. We know, for example, that after a lifetime of camaraderie that few experience, it will remain as a longing for those past times.

2. We know in the Military life there is a fellowship which lasts long after the uniforms are hung up in the back of the closet.

3. We know even if he throws them away, they will be on him with every step and breath that remains in his life. We also know how the very bearing of the man speaks of what he was and in his heart still is.

These are the burdens of the job. You will still look at people suspiciously, still see what others do not see or choose to ignore and always will look at the rest of the Military world with a respect for what they do; only grown in a lifetime of knowing.

Never think for one moment you are escaping from that life. You are only escaping the 'job' and merely being allowed to leave 'active' duty.

So what I wish for you is that whenever you ease

into retirement, in your heart you never forget for one moment that you are still a member of the greatest fraternity the world has ever known.

NOW... Civilian Friends vs. Veteran Friends  
Comparisons:

CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Get upset if you're too busy to talk to them for a week.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Are glad to see you after years, and will happily carry on the same conversation you were having the last time you met.

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Have never seen you cry.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Have cried with you.

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Keep your stuff so long they forget it's yours.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Borrow your stuff for a few days then give it back.

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Know a few things about you.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Could write a book with direct quotes from you.

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Will leave you behind if that's what the crowd is doing.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Will stand by you no matter what the crowd does.

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Are for a while.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Are for life.

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Have shared a few experiences...

VETERAN FRIENDS: Have shared a lifetime of experiences no citizen could ever dream of...

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Will take your drink away when they think you've had enough.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Will look at you stumbling all over the place and say, 'You better drink the rest of that before you spill it!' Then carry you home safely and put you to bed...

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CIVILIAN FRIENDS: Will ignore this.

VETERAN FRIENDS: Will forward this.

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A veteran - whether active duty, retired, served one hitch, or reserve is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank check made payable to 'The Government of the United States of America' for an amount of 'up to and including my life'.



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*From one Veteran to another, it's an honor to be in your company. Thank you for your service to our country and defending the freedoms we enjoy.*  
Austin O'Brien 67-68

### **The 2010 VA-12 Memorial Reunion Memory**

As I flew back to Phoenix after the reunion I stared out the window of the plane and thought of the passing weekend now becoming distant as the miles flew by. I wondered if it was just five days or was it really 40 plus years of my life that were now passing by.

It was only a couple of months ago that I had re-discovered my great friend, and fellow plane captain FM Smith. In his enthusiasm he spoke of the VA-12 website that I should visit and mentioned that there was an upcoming reunion. Moments later I was leaving my contact on the visitor's page for hopefully someone would remember me. It soon was answered by none other than Stubby; my old roommate at Cecil Field and like FM was another noted expert beer drinker and trouble maker. That would be AKA Terry Nies to all shipmates of that era. It was nip and tuck for many weeks as to whether I would be able to attend. My emotions soared when finally I could see my way clear. The tickets were bought, the reservations made, and the itinerary complete. I was finally on my way! Like a small child going to a great outing I could not sleep the week before. I knew that I was on my way to see the likes of the characters of my youth. There would be Killer, Pig Pen, Kap, Stubby, Eric, and so many more.

Finally arriving at the hotel Terry met me at the elevator and we were off to the ice breaker. The doors opened and there they all were..... just like I remembered them..... mostly inebriated. For the next three days we toured the memorials, saw the sights and had a most remarkable experience. We shed some tears at "The Wall" and stood proudly at attention at the tomb of the "Unknown Soldier". We took stock in the ceremony of our squadron plaque now on display at the Naval Memorial.

We walked among the graves at Arlington Cemetery and wondered if these young men who had lost their lives were just like us. Boys doing a man's job. We endured the long hot walk to Neal Russo's grave, and Neal..... if you are by some chance at my side reading over my shoulder we want you to know that we would have searched until dark if that's what it took for us to once again stand by your side.

Shipmates again my long lost friend. The fellowship went on and on. The stories told and retold. I laughed until my sides hurt. I swelled with pride at the banquet to be among some of this country's finest veterans.

Now that I am back home and some of the details of the trip already fading I'd like to complete just one last item on my agenda. To salute all of you who attended and made this the trip of a lifetime for me.

Hero's you are..... one and all.

"BJ" Smith ADJ2  
Proud VA12 Veteran

### **In Solemn Ritual, Sailors Commit Fallen To The Deep**

ABOARD THE GUNSTON HALL--In the middle of a busy day training off the Virginia coast, about two dozen sailors stop what they're doing, change into their dress whites and gather in the well deck--a cavernous space at the rear of their ship that opens to the sea and the sunlit sky.

Five small metal containers sit on a table, holding the ashes of four men and a woman. The sailors know nothing about them except their name and rank. They've gathered in response to a simple command:

"All hands, bury the dead."

Osama bin Laden is perhaps the most famous recipient of a Navy burial at sea. But the ceremony is conducted far more often to honor military veterans, active-duty or retired, and their family members.

Civilian mariners from Military Sealift Command also are eligible. Earlier this week on the Gunston Hall, an amphibious dock landing ship homeported in Virginia Beach, sailors lowered the stern gate and placed a table covered in a royal blue cloth at its edge, a few feet above water frothing in the ship's wake. They set the remains of Chief Petty Officer Marion Tisdom on the table next to a folded American flag. Command Master Chief James Yee and Senior Chief Petty Officer Jason Whiteford stood at attention on either side of the table.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth do change and though the mountains be shaken into the hearts of the seas," said the chaplain, Lt. Jeff Augustin. "For this is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death."

Yee picked up the flag and walked back into the well deck to stand before the ship's commanding

officer, Capt. John Meier. They exchanged salutes, and Meier took the flag.

"Unto God Almighty we commend the ashes of Chief Ship's Serviceman Marion Tisdom to the deep, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ," Augustin continued. "Amen."

Whiteford lifted one end of the table and the container slipped into the waves. David Harper, a tall, ramrod-straight chief petty officer, called out, "Firing detail, order arms!"

Seven sailors raised their rifles at Harper's command, then fired three shots. The shells clattered to the steel deck.

Through it all, Yee, Meier and the chaplain held their salutes. Taps sounded over two loudspeakers. After the last note played, the ship's second-in-command, Lt. Cmdr. Shawn Bohrer, said, "This concludes the committal of SHC Marion Tisdom. At ease."

For all its ceremony, the service took no more than about 10 minutes.

Because burials are done when ships are under way, relatives and friends cannot attend.

To make up for that, sailors collect the spent shells from the three-volley salute to be sent to the family along with the flag from the service and a nautical chart marking the location of the burial. Meier also sends a note.

"It's very distant, but it's very meaningful," said Augustin, the chaplain. "You definitely see the personal side of the Navy.... We're constantly go, go, do this, do that. But to stop and pause and watch the casket of someone go off... I think it's a necessary tradition."

By Meredith Kruse, The Virginian-Pilot

## Treasury Report

Previous Balance	220.60
Dues/Donations	839.00
<b>SUB TOTAL</b>	<b>1059.60</b>
Stamps	86.40
Envelopes	21.19
Printing *	177.54
<b>CURRENT EXPENSES</b>	<b>285.13</b>
Memorial Bell Fund	431.00
<b>NEW BALANCE</b>	<b>774.47</b>

## Tom Gierhart's Story – Pt 2

After leaving Mayport we headed south and crossed the equator on 11 March, 1970. All the poor souls classified as pollywogs or simply Wogs, would be initiated in an event that we would be remembered

for life. For two weeks before crossing the equator the galley had been saving appropriate garbage for the festive event. I remember that fateful day, the equatorial blazed down and was horribly hot.

Keeping the sweat out of your eyes was a chore. We, the 4000 pitiful creatures, clad in pants, T-shirt, and boots would humbly visit Neptunus Rex and his court. We mustered in hanger bay one and were issued subpoenas and told not lose them for fear of going through the whole ordeal a second time.

Crawling on hands and knees about half the length of the ship, we were taken up to the flight deck via the forward aircraft elevator close to the bow. Once on the flight deck we were ushered with kicks and yells along the hot starboard steam catapult track with whacks across the butt. These men were the crusty shellbacks with lengths of 2 inch fire hose made into paddles. Some of us had raw eggs crammed into the rear of their trousers form fitting the curvature of the butt crack and then broken with a whack from a fire hose. This actually took away a lot of friction that may have built up between the cheeks as one crawled along. A blessing in disguise unknown to the tormentors.

Crawling at a fast pace, we arrived at the Royal barber. A wog could not crawl to the feet of the Royal Chief Judge unkempt. The next step was the next to the biggie, kissing the Royal Baby's belly. This was a real treat as the fattest shell back aboard had his hairy belly smeared with grease, ketchup, mustard, Tabasco sauce, and other substances that one can only guess at. Remembering back, it did not taste all that bad. When we finally arrived at the feet of #1, Neptunus Rex, of course, he sentenced all of us to the torture pit. After all, how else are we going to become shell backs? Somehow I was not surprised with the sentence. One of the torture chambers was a canvas chute just large enough to crawl through. When you came out the end eager hands waited to cram old rotten food into your face, forcing it up your nose and into your sinus cavities ending up in the back of your throat creating quite a gag factor. Since we went through the initiation late in the afternoon, we followed several thousands that crawled through before and many had thrown up. This made for a horrible foul smelling and slick passage through the chute. I added my share to the mess and kept going. It gave the shell backs tormentors great pleasure to step on the canvas in front the person inside and beat his butt for a while. Many tortures were in place that day. One was the bottom half of a jet engine container filled with salt

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water. I sat on the end and was ordered "Open yer mouth ya filthy Wog", and in came a squirt of alum and a hard shove backwards doing a perfect back flip into the salt water. This actually felt good, not only was it refreshing by getting the sweat out of my eyes, but also the food from my mouth and nose. Everyone made it through at least two or three torture events and then the final test. About 20 or so shell backs formed a gauntlet line and all were equipped with fire hoses and a gleam in their eyes. You walked through the line with hands on the head. Anyone who ran was jerked out and had to go through again, no exceptions. Toward the end of the line your cheeks were getting pretty rosy hot with the constant whacks but I made it through the first time and then it was all over. Most of us simply took off our pants at the rear of the flight deck and threw them overboard. In the end we would be given passage into the Royal Order of the Shellbacks. Let me add that the initiation was voluntary. Those too afraid simply and did not participate received no shell back card. You could also quit at any time. There were monitors assigned to ensure the masochists and other pain rendering SOB's did not get too carried away with the fire hoses. Anyway, all Naval Tradition and Rio was only a few days away and liberty.

### **Combat Arena**

Yankee station lay approximately 100 miles east of Danang in the Gulf of Tonkin, between north and south Vietnam. This position varied, of course, depending on joint combat operational requirements. We were always ready on arrival. The Shang transported us around the world in nine months and gave all on board the experience of a lifetime. It made boys into men, polywogs into shell backs, a lot of married men single, and unfortunately, some wife's into widows.

Working day shift was the most taxing and had the lions share of activity due to flight operations. That changed of course when we were engaged in night operations and the flight deck at night was rated as the second most dangerous job. Many a tale I could tell about my flight deck experiences but not at this writing. Normally two or three aircraft carriers operated at Yankee Station at any given time. A third was to stand in for the in port carrier. We would take on ammunition, jet fuel, and black oil for the ships boilers from scheduled supply ships known as UNREP (underway replenishment) normally by means of a "multiple high lines" between the two ships steaming side by side.. On occasions we

would have a VERTREP (vertical replenishment) using CH-47 helicopters transferring supplies between ships. We also transferred personnel with this method but most of the time they would fly on and off in the ship's twin engine S-2 Provider, AKA "COD" (carrier on board delivery aircraft). Flight operations were quite hectic. Launches were comprised of four aircraft from each of the three A-4 squadrons, and the two fighter squadrons. Between the squadrons there was always one A-4 tanker aircraft configured with a center line fueling store (buddy tanker) on each launch. This tanker aircraft carried no ordnance and his sole purpose was to give fuel to any aircraft in need returning to the ship. This was by means of a 2 inch hose that reeled out about 100 feet with a drogue on the end. The receiver aircraft accepted fuel with a probe on the side of the aircraft. The norm was 8 launches and recoveries per operating day. When the first launch recovered aboard the aircraft would taxi from the arresting wires to the bow of the flight deck where immediately upon engine shutdown the pressure fuel hose would start pumping fuel into the tanks. Ordnance would also be loading at this time but as soon as the recovery was complete all aircraft forward would be towed aft for next launch re-spot. As the aircraft moved aft to the final position the "ordies" would chase the aircraft pushing their bombs to finish the loading. These aircraft were manned, started, checked, and final inspected and taxied forward and launched. Then the previous launch would then start landing. Aircraft were launching and recovering at the same time. So it went, eight times per day, one and one half hour cycles per flight event lasting 12 to 14 hours. The Plane Captains, called crew chiefs by the Air Force, would start their day with the sound of "Flight Quarters" over the 1MC. The flight deck people would get dressed, quickly eat if time allowed, and except for the first launch plane captains, head for their aircraft. They would then remove all of the tie down chains leaving 7 of the 16 chains on the aircraft. The 7 chains were then removed when the aircraft was manned by the pilots. They would carry the heavy chains on their back in a canvas chain bag to the "island", the super structure on the flight deck, and were free for an hour and a half to eat or whatever, until their aircraft "trapped" (engaged the arresting wires). These plane captains would then chase the aircraft forward and when the aircraft stopped and would hook up the chains again as the fueling was started. Place captains with aircraft on



the hanger deck (parking below the flight deck) would always be required to be at their aircraft until flight quarters secured. Six combat line periods would be made by the Shang during the course of the cruise.

During the course of our first of six combat line periods, the three A-4 squadrons had many aircraft divert into Da Nang for various reasons. Some landed there with maintenance problems, others with battle damage or hung ordnance. Whatever the reason, myself, sometimes accompanied by another person depending on what the maintenance problem called for, would fly to Da Nang on the ship's COD. There we would repair the down A-4 and send it back to the ship. Sometimes A-4's from our sister squadrons would be repaired by us and sent back to the ship. Even though we are in different squadrons, we are still in the same Navy. At times, I would not have a chance to exit the aircraft and set foot on the flight deck before someone from squadron maintenance would open the aircraft entrance door and tell me to stay on board for the next launch as we had another aircraft down.

Going to the carrier air group maintenance chief I requested a composite maintenance crew of 5 men of various specialties not including myself, to stay TDY in Da Nang and repair all the ships A-4 aircraft. I explained that I had performed the same service while on a previous cruise in 1968 aboard the USS Kitty Hawk attached to VA-144 "Roadrunners," The request was honored and I ended up with the same maintenance hanger I had during my last stay in Da Nang in 1968. The hanger was an open ended Quonset hut that would accommodate 2 aircraft and our maintenance gear.

Life was good in Da Nang and it didn't turn into the wind to launch aircraft. The launching though, was done though by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army in the form of 91mm, 122 mm rockets, and 81mm mortars. It was a quite a show watching the Marine fire support base atop Monkey Mountain send down .50 cal. Tracers at the bad guys. Cobra gunships joined in from the air base trying to find the launch sites. I did not appreciate the fact that we were on the receiving end of the fireworks and could not shoot back.

This TDY arrangement worked well except for a future drawback for which I am still paying. My maintenance hanger was at the edge of the loading ramp for Agent Orange. The ramp was awash with orange puddles spilled from loading the Air Force C-

123 Provider aircraft in support of "Operation Ranch Hand" to defoliate the jungles around the various bases. When these aircraft would power out from the loading area to the taxi way an orange mist would blow into our hanger covering everything inside including the inside of our lungs. We would fly back to the ship when the line period was over and the Shang was going to a good liberty port like Japan or Hong Kong, but if she was heading back to Subic Bay we would elect to remain in Da Nang. Our rationale being that we would have a week off without the ship, and enemy fire not considered, we actually had a short vacation and cold beer at the club to boot. In Subic the air wing would offload at Cubi Point and fly 3 or 4 days and nights while in port. The squadron personnel normally had a total of 2 days liberty days starting at 1600 till midnight. The enlisted club in Da Nang had a sign by the front door that read "Dodge City" and for good reason. Everyone checked their weapons before entering due to the bullet holes in the floor and ceilings before that law was passed. Stories still fresh about some Marines pulling the pin on a grenade and passing it around while the rest of the club evacuated toward the emergency exits and out the windows. My small maintenance crew stayed in Da Nang most of the line periods and life was good. BUT, all good things must come to an end. Following the last line period on Yankee Station we flew back to the ship and steamed back to Subic Bay.



### **Life after Ubangies.**

After my return to the States, "the world" as known by Vietnam vets, I would like to tell you about events after my tour with the Flying Ubangies. I received orders to Millington, Tennessee and attended ADJ "B" (advanced jet engine training). After graduation I was off to VA-127 at NAS Lemoore CA. Attack Squadron 127 was known as the "Batmen" and were the RAG (Replacement Air Group) training squadron for West coast for A-4 squadrons. We also flew the F9F-8T for instrument training. Following about six month as check crew maintenance department supervisor, I made Chief. Being the only single chief, and I might add junior

Chief, guess who was selected for most of the two week detachments to NAS Fallon, Nevada, MCAS Yuma, Arizona, and most all shipboard carrier qualification off California coast for pilot training? I really didn't mind though, after all, that's what I joined the Navy for, right? It seemed that I spent more time at sea off the coast of California than in the Mediterranean or Pacific.

During the 3 years at NAS Lemoore, and being a private pilot, I purchased a 1946 Taylorcraft for \$1100 and flew it all over California and Nevada, that is, when I was on dry land. This aircraft was a side by side tube and fabric construction with high wings and a tail wheel at the rear. It had a 75 horse power engine and flew at a whopping 85 mph, if you were lucky. I went to air shows almost every weekend sleeping under the wing most of the time. There were always Saturday night dances in the hangers, Sunday morning breakfasts and then the air shows. After many hours I upgraded from the 75 hp Taylorcraft to a Cessna 150 with a 150 HP engine. Better performance with twice the power but only half the fun. On Sundays when at Fallon I would fly the bombing ranges and to the old ghost towns in the Carson Sink area. I was also a "back seater" in the squadron's TA-4F's. The TA-4 was actually easier to fly as far as basic "stick and rudder" flying goes because it had no P factor, no torque, no tail wheel, and no heel brakes to contend with. Of course, I am talking about basic flying. When it comes to complexities of the A-4 there would be no comparison. It gave me a real respect for the men who flew powerful round engines on single engine aircraft such as the A1 Skyraider with 3,000 HP and no hydraulics to assist with the flight controls. You could identify those pilots by their oversized right leg they used to keep the aircraft headed straight, especially on takeoff.



**Tom Gierhart 69-70**

(Part 3 of Tom's story will continue in the next issue!)

## In Memoriam

RJ "Joel" Parrish left us on 2/20/11 a long time support of the VA12 Reunion Association,



Responsible for finding many of the Ubangi's from the 1950's era.

Gary D. Kmet passed away 11/2/10, Gary served with many of us from the 66 WestPac cruise.



## Fly Your Colors



Dave Smith's plate in New York, Dave served in the squadron in 1970-72

## New Member

Here is our newest member since the last newsletter.

<b>Tom Gierhart</b>	<b>69-70</b>
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