

The Last Prop Fighter

Sandys, Hobos, Fireflies, Zorros, and Spads

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Our Air Force heritage in the pre-Vietnam days, from World War I and II, was the era of the prop-driven fighter. The Korean experience saw our then-relatively new USAF deploy a mix of legacy prop fighters like the P-51 Mustang, and “brand new” jets, the F-80, F-84, and F-86. As the jet era blossomed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Air Force deployed F-100, F-101, F-104, F-105, and other second-generation jets. The transition of the Navy’s F-4 Phantom into the USAF occurred just as the Vietnam War began, and the first US fighters deployed to bases in South Vietnam and Thailand were all jets, with one notable exception. As F-4 Phantoms, F-100 Super Sabres, and F-105 Thunderchiefs began flying USAF combat missions in Southeast Asia, they were joined by a venerable prop-driven attack fighter, the Douglas A-1 Skyraider. For just more than nine years, Air Force pilots operated that one propeller-driven fighter, transferred from the US Navy (USN) inventory. This is the story of that airplane—its pilots, units, and missions—documenting the last prop fighter to fly combat in our Air Force.

The Douglas A-1 Skyraider was originally a Navy attack plane with an AD label, (referred to as “Able Dog” in those days but later changed to A-1), conceived in the last months of World War II and flown worldwide by Navy units between wars and in combat in Korea in the 1950s. More than 3,000 were delivered, including a combination of single-seat and two-seat attack models and specialized electronic warfare birds.¹ Initial Navy combat deployments to Southeast Asia in response to the Tonkin Gulf incident in 1964 saw each carrier use one or more Skyraider squadrons on attack missions in North and South Vietnam. As the Navy drew down its A-1 force in the 1964–1968 timeframe, the USAF Air Commando force—the precursor to today’s Special Operations Command—took the A-1 into our Air Force, given the aircraft’s unique combination of close air support accuracy, station time and persistence, and low-altitude survivability.

Compared to other USAF combat fighter/attack planes, the A-1’s history with our Air Force was relatively brief. When the United States sent the first surplus Navy Skyraiders to the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) in the early sixties, along with a handful of US advisors, an era began that would span 9 years and more than 90,000 USAF combat sorties, and a peak intensity of more than 1,000 Air Force Skyraider combat sorties a month. Throughout this period, a comparatively small num-

ber of USAF pilots flew combat in the A-1. While approximately 1,000 pilots attended the 4407th Combat Crew Training Squadron Skyraider upgrade program at Hurlburt Field, Florida during those years, the best estimates are that only about 700—less than 100 during an average combat year—actually ended up flying the Skyraider in Southeast Asia (SEA)—while others who went through the Hurlburt course went to staff roles at Seventh Air Force (AF), Seventh/Thirteenth AF, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), Task Force Alpha, and wing and base-level command posts.²

For USAF Skyraider pilots, it was not, by any measure, a “milk run” kind of combat tour. We are all familiar with the fortitude and perseverance of our USAF F-105 Thunderchief pilots whose predominantly North Vietnam mission assignments led to the F-105 Thunderchief, nicknamed “Thud,” having the highest overall combat loss rate in the war, 2.1 per 1,000 Southeast Asia sorties.³ What is less well-known, however, is that the A-1 suffered the highest loss rates for missions in North Vietnam compared to F-105, F-100, F-4, and all other USAF and USN aircraft recorded—7.2 for USAF A-1, 4.5 for the Hun, 3.3 for the Thud, and 1.7 for the Phantom. The A-1 loss rates in Laos and South Vietnam were also the highest of any combat aircraft, Air Force or Navy/Marine.

The Skyraider overall SEA loss rate was 1.7, second to the Thud at 2.1. This comparison is driven by the much larger number of Thud sorties flown “up North” as a percent of F-105 total combat sorties in the theater, compared to all other aircraft types. The A-1’s 1.7 overall SEA mission loss rate was essentially double that of the next three combat aircraft—USN A-6 at 0.9; USN F-8 at 0.8; and USAF F-4 and RF-4 at 0.8. The Vietnam Memorial Wall bears the names of 104 USAF Skyraider pilots—approximately one out of every seven who flew an A-1 combat tour—and 40 US Navy pilots killed in action (KIA) in Southeast Asia as well.⁴

On the other side of these somber statistics is a benefit that all of us A-1 pilots fully appreciated—when USAF measured the number of aircraft lost as a percentage of aircraft hit by ground fire or SAM’s, the A-1 was by far the most survivable when hit, more than double the statistics for the F-105, F-100, and F-4. Skyraider combat losses totaled 157 aircraft, 94 in Laos, 19 in North Vietnam (NVN), and 44 in South Vietnam (SVN). More than 80 A-1 pilots were rescued, including 50 in Laos, nine in NVN, and 22 in SVN.⁵ If those numbers don’t seem to match, the reason for 104 combat deaths, 157 aircraft lost, and more than 80 aviators recovered is that some A-1 sorties in the E and G two-seat models, particularly in SVN, had two pilots on board.⁶

In his recent book on the A-1, my 1st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) colleague, 1st Lt Bryon “Hook” Hukee, notes that the 602nd SOS, which pioneered the Sandy search and rescue (SAR) mission tactics and execution, on the one hand saved dozens and dozens of downed aviators, many in extremely high-threat environments in NVN and Laos. On the other, the Fireflies paid a huge price. From June 1965 to December 1966, the 602nd lost 35 A-1s, with 20 pilots either KIA or missing in action. By the time the 602nd had moved to Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) and later was inactivated in December 1970, those losses had risen to 77 Skyraiders and 38 pilots—loss rate statistics matched only, per the now declassified DOD statistics, in some of the F-105 Thunderchief squadrons or the F-100 Misty FACs “going North” during these same months.⁷

Overall combat SAR in SEA—the Air Force and Navy versions of “leave no one behind”—was surprisingly effective, even with the technologies and equipment of the time. In the entire conflict, more than 2,700 airmen were shot down. Just more than half of those—50.5 percent—survived. Of those survivors, four out of every five were rescued, sometimes by the USAF SAR force—the Sandies, HH-3 and HH-53 Jollies, C-130 King, and FAC’s—and others by *ad hoc* “come as you are” combinations of on-scene aircraft and helicopters. The combat rescue numbers in North Vietnam are perhaps even more significant, and by comparison more impressive. Of all aircrews downed in NVN, 60.8 percent survived. More than half of those survivors were rescued, even given the much higher threat environment in the enemy’s “home territory.” For the majority of those rescues, A-1 Skyraiders—both USAF, and Navy earlier in the war—were the mission commanders and CAS for the pickup helicopters.⁸

One A-1 Skyraider Sandy Lead, then-Captain Ed Leonard, led the rescue effort for a Navy A-7 pilot, Kenny Wayne Fields, shot down in May 1968 near Tchepone, a notorious choke point on the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT) in Central Laos. When Fields was ultimately rescued by the USAF SAR force after four days on the ground, 189 sorties had been flown, seven aircraft lost or severely damaged, and Captain Leonard was shot down, captured and imprisoned in Hanoi. Fields’ telling of this harrowing story gives great insight into Leonard’s bravery, and the SAR mission and the respective roles of A-1s, Jolly Green Giant helicopters, forward air control (FAC), C-130 King birds, and supporting strike aircraft, along with the entire USAF command and control structure.⁹

A-1 survivability rates—even in situations where planes were disabled on SAR or close air support sorties below 1,000 feet above the ground—were bolstered by a remarkable insertion of technology into the 1950s-era Skyraiders. The original Navy and USAF A-1 pilots had no ejection seat, and literally had to “step over the side” and activate their parachute, *a la* World War II and Korean War style bailouts. In 1967, after more than three years of combat sorties in SEA by both Navy and USAF Skyraiders, the A-1 was retrofitted with a remarkable Stanley Aviation Yankee Extraction System. The Yankee used a small spin-stabilized rocket to “pull” or “extract” the pilot and parachute upward and out of the cockpit with nylon cables attached to the parachute harness, and then used an explosive charge to rapidly deploy the parachute canopy immediately after the pilot cleared the fuselage. The “zero altitude/zero airspeed,” unusual attitude performance of the Yankee system—1.7 seconds from activation to full chute deployment—proved to be a huge factor in improving survival rates for the pilots of stricken Skyraiders.¹⁰ Rube Goldberg has nothing on the Stanley engineers, and those of us who used the Yankee are forever indebted to this amazing inventiveness.

The A-1 was powered by the Pratt and Whitney RD-3350 with its 13-foot, 6-inch, four-blade propeller, and its pilots had a particular swagger and esprit of the bygone prop era. However, that same spirit and bravado, in the face of highly dangerous missions, led to issues back in the continental United States. Because of its “love” of jet aircraft and sometimes blatant dislike of the “prop guys,” the leadership of then-Tactical Air Command (now Air Combat Command) looked down upon the Air Commando/Special Operations part of the force. This led to a good number of early Skyraider pilot assignments to people who had been flying other big aircraft—C-47, C-54, KC-97, etc., as opposed to front-line TAC fighter pilots. Early on, the number

of lieutenants straight out of undergraduate pilot training (UPT) was also quite small. Later, in the 1970–1972 timeframe, more new UPT grads secured A-1 assignments right after receiving their wings. Another significant source of Skyraider pilots was the old Air Defense Command, where highly experienced F-101, F-102, and F-106 interceptor pilots ended up in the A-1 as well. A fourth source of Skyraider pilots came from experienced ATC FAIPs (first assignment instructor pilots) who had served three to five years as instructors, right out of their UPT classes. USAF Skyraider combat squadron alumni are an interesting cross-section of all four of these backgrounds.¹¹

Through the course of the war between 1964 and 1972, USAF A-1 combat operations were flown first by advisors to VNAF units in SVN, and later, by four squadrons, early in the war named air commando squadrons, and later changed to special operations squadrons, the title that remains in our service's special operations force structure today. The 1st SOS Hobos, the 602nd SOS Fireflies, the 6th SOS Spads, and the 22nd SOS Zorros operated throughout the combat theater, flying strike, CAS, special operations, and SAR missions in North Vietnam, Laos, South Vietnam, and Cambodia. The Hobos started out at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam flying T-28s and A-26s, and in 1964, transitioned to the A-1. That same year, the brand new 602nd ACS stood up at Bien Hoa as the second Skyraider unit.¹²

The third air commando squadron flying the Skyraider was the 6th ACS, which formed at Pleiku, SVN in February 1968. The 6th ACS, with 20 aircraft and 25 pilots, operated a detachment at Danang, and in late 1969, was disbanded and the planes and pilots transferred to NKP. In its short 18-month existence, the 6th ACS lost 12 pilots in combat, almost half of its normal manning. In addition to these four A-1 squadrons, other USAF Skyraider pilots flew as advisors to VNAF squadrons and in other short-term alert and forward operating location situations at a variety of air bases in SVN before 1969.¹³

Later in the conflict, as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-directed US war effort in support of General Vang Pao's Hmong tribesmen in Northern Laos heated up, so did the effort to interdict North Vietnamese supply lines in Laos, and provide CAS to the Laotian irregulars. In Laos operating much in secret, the CIA-managed ground war demanded more and more CAS and covert special operations missions. At the behest of the US ambassador to Laos and the CIA, the A-1 force grew, and relocated across the Mekong River to Thailand. In 1968, the 1st SOS moved from Pleiku, SVN to NKP on the Mekong River less than 50 miles from the heart of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.¹⁴ The 602nd SOS, which had previously shifted from Bien Hoa to Nha Trang, SVN, also moved in late 1966 to Udorn RTAFB, and then in 1968 to NKP. Also in late 1968, USAF stood up its fourth A-1 combat squadron, the 22nd SOS Zorros, also at NKP. The 56th Special Operations Wing, home to a wide variety of special mission aircraft from CH-53s and CH-3s to C-119K gunships to C-123 flareships to QU-22Bs, thus became the Air Force's first, last, and only large-scale, three squadron A-1 Skyraider combat unit, with more than 70 aircraft at its peak.¹⁵ The Raven FACs, living and flying covertly in Laos at a series of airfields, were attached to the 56th SOW as well.¹⁶

NKP was a hub for USAF support for the air war in Laos, SAR missions across the theater, and a series of highly demanding special operations infiltration/exfiltration sorties for the Army's MACV, Studies and Observations Group (SOG), a special

forces program of behind the lines recce, sabotage, road watch, and other covert functions. Flying with the NKP A-1s on these SOG missions, code-named Heavy Hook and Prairie Fire, were USAF forward air controllers—at first O-2s and later OV-10s—from the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron Nails, and CH-3s and CH-53s from the 21st SOS Knives, all in support of the MACV SOG mobile launch team (MLT) 3, Heavy Hook, based 100 yards from the NKP “Hobo Hootch” quarters of the 1st SOS.¹⁷ In November 1970, the superbly executed but profoundly frustrating prisoner of war rescue raid on the North Vietnamese camp at Son Tay was launched from NKP, with the CAS provided by a force of five A-1 Skyraiders, call sign Peach 01–05, from the 1st SOS. The almost perfectly flown mission found a recently emptied camp, and the force returned home emptyhanded.¹⁸

The A-1 pilots at NKP and Udorn had a special relationship with the in-country “air force” of the CIA in Laos, Air America. Air America flew a wide range of supply, medevac, recce, and other support for the Hmong forces in Northern Laos, and for the Royalist forces in central and southern parts of the country. Air America Huey and H-34 helos, and light STOL aircraft like Porters and Heliocouriers, flew dozens of sorties each day in and out of contested territory, and for protection, they frequently asked for a Skyraider flight, either before or after that A-1 flight had conducted a strike or CAS mission, to cover their ingress, ground time, and egress from a wide variety of Lima Sites and other locations throughout Laos.¹⁹

Since the enemy was generally reluctant to fire on the unarmed Air America aircraft with two A-1s, with 20 mm cannon, 2.75-inch Mk 4 folding-fin aerial rockets, 7.62 mm Gatling gun pods, white phosphorus bombs, and cluster bomb units orbiting right overhead, this “cover” was generally highly effective, and understandably much appreciated by the Air America crews. The extent to which the support was “returned” to the NKP A-1 force is obvious. During my one-year tour from April to April, 1971–1972, all five of my 1st SOS Hobo colleagues who survived a shoot down and extraction in the Skyraider were rescued quickly by Air America, long before our USAF SAR force of Sandies and Jollies could scramble from NKP, Ubon, or Danang and pick them up.²⁰

The Raven FACs in Laos were also special “brothers” to the A-1 force operating there. As is now widely known, the then-secret Raven program brought experienced FACs from throughout SEA, willing to extend their one-year combat tours for six more months, to a covert program operating from Laotian bases in support of the CIA’s war effort, and directing US and Laotian strike aircraft against a wide range of enemy targets. Interestingly enough, the now-declassified data on SEA combat sorties, loss rates, and other similar data does not seem to include the Ravens and their remarkable covert work in O-1, L-19, and T-28 missions throughout Laos. It is reasonable to assume that, if such data were available, the battle damage and loss rates per 1,000 sorties for these warriors look much like the F-105 and A-1 numbers noted earlier. The Ravens alumni roster includes some notable USAF aviators, as do their combat KIA statistics.²¹

Before my own tour in the 1st SOS, two A-1 pilots from that squadron were awarded the Medal of Honor (MOH) for their bravery under fire on Skyraider sorties. The story of Maj Bernie Fisher is the stuff of legend. On 10 March 1966, while leading a flight of six A-1s in support of US special forces being overrun in their for-

ward base camp in the A Shau Valley in northern South Vietnam, Major Fisher's wingman, Maj D. W. "Jump" Myers, was hit and forced to crash-land on the small airstrip that was itself the object of the attack. Under withering enemy mortar, heavy machine gun, and small arms fire, Major Fisher landed his two seat A-1E on the cratered runway, loaded Major Myers into his empty right seat, and successfully took off through that barrage of enemy fire, returning to Pleiku, their home base. President Lyndon B. Johnson awarded Major Fisher the MOH in January 1967 in the White House. Remarkably, Major Fisher's aircraft on that mission, A-1E SN 52-132649, survived two more years of war, returning home in 1968. Today, it is displayed in the SEA exhibition at the National Museum of the US Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.²²

Just 18 months later, after the major standup of A-1s at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, a Sandy force launched from the 602nd SOS for a SAR effort near Dong Hoi, NVN. During the process of locating and protecting the USAF pilot survivor on the ground, Sandy Lead Lt Col William A. Jones III suffered major battle damage and a raging fire in his A-1H. Realizing the fire was going to consume the cockpit, Colonel Jones pulled the extraction handle. The canopy jettisoned, but the fire had damaged the Yankee rocket, and he remained in the cockpit, now seriously burned. Fortunately, the fire went out with the canopy jettison, and Colonel Jones continued to precisely locate the survivor, leaving Dong Hoi to return to NKP only after he was sure of the survivor's exact location. The downed crewmember rescued later that day, incidentally, was F-4 pilot Capt Jack Wilson, later my colleague in the Missouri Air National Guard's 131st Fighter Wing in St. Louis.²³

Returning to the United States in 1969, Jones was promoted to colonel, and recommended for the MOH. After that recommendation, but before the award could be made, Colonel Jones tragically died in a private aircraft accident. President Richard M. Nixon presented the medal posthumously to his wife in August 1970.²⁴ As a final footnote, Colonel Jones' badly damaged Skyraider, A-1H tail number 738, was fully repaired and returned to NKP. During my own tour, I flew that aircraft on eight combat missions, including some challenging SARs. "The Proud American," as it was labeled during 1971-1972, was flown as Sandy 1 on Roger Locher's famous Oyster 01 Bravo SAR in 1972, when my NKP roommate, then-Capt Ron Smith, was awarded the Air Force Cross for snatching Locher after a 23-day evasion and escape near Hanoi in NVN. A-1H tail number 738 was ultimately lost in combat in late 1972. The pilot, 1st Lt and later Gen Lance Smith, successfully extracted and was recovered by Air America in Laos.

When I arrived at NKP in April 1971 to join the 1st SOS Hobos, by then the last prop fighter squadron in combat for USAF, the unit possessed 32 A-1s, 24 single-seat H and J models, and eight two-seat E and G models. When I returned home in April 1972, there were only 13 aircraft left in the Hobos. More than a half-dozen of these losses came in a matter of weeks in April that year, with the North Vietnamese invasion across the demilitarized zone, and the infamous BAT 21 SAR. The NVA use of the shoulder-fired SA-7 Strela-2, a Russian copy of the US Redeye, brought down some of those Hobos. Even after a few more replacement aircraft were delivered from the states, the Air Force literally ran out of flyable airplanes a few months later in late 1972. With the 1st SOS unable to meet basic daily SAR alert and CIA

CAS fragment requirements, the USAF deployed two temporary duty squadrons of A-7s, the recently acquired USAF jet attack aircraft thought most closely suited to perform A-1 missions, to Korat RTAFB, Thailand. Later, some of these aircraft formed the 3rd TFS within Korat's 388th Tactical Fighter Wing, and would fly more than 12,000 combat hours before returning to the United States in early 1976.²⁵

Most of the younger A-1 Sandies served "parole" tours as ATC instructor pilots when they returned to the states, because TAC initially refused in 1970–1972 to take any of the returning Skyraider pilots into that command. This reflected the anti-special-operations bias noted earlier, even though these young combat veterans each had 300–500 hours of combat CAS experience. A very special friend of the USAF Skyraider community at the time, particularly given this TAC hostility, was then-ATC commander Lt Gen William McBride. General McBride—via an old-fashioned TWIX message—made a personal commitment to the returning A-1 pilots after their tours, knowing of TAC's refusal to take them into that command. The general's message stated that his staff would make every effort to "give you the ATC base and aircraft of your choice." By my count, every single Spad driver who returned after General McBride's offer—including yours truly who returned to Moody AFB, Georgia in the T-38—got exactly that, the ATC base and aircraft of their choice. This meant that when TAC leadership changed a short time later and Gen Wilbur L. Creech asked "where are all the Skyraider guys with all that CAS combat time?" TAC was able to reclaim a large number of the experienced A-1 pilots, and the proud Sandy tradition was continued, even to this day.²⁶

Returning to TAC, many former younger SEA A-1 pilots became leaders in USAF's A-7 and soon-to-follow new A-10 force. Today, in USAF special operations and SAR missions in Southwest Asia, and in Bosnia and Iraq earlier, many of the A-10 mission plans, tactics, and rescue force coordination principles are direct descendants of the A-1 Sandy operations and lessons learned from four decades ago in SEA. Among the more than 600 USAF pilots who actually flew combat in the Skyraider, many of that alumni list went on to serve long and successful Air Force careers. The group includes a former chief of staff, Gen Michael Dugan; four other four-star generals, Butch Vicellio, Jim Jamerson, Al Hansen and Lance Smith; Lt Gen Gordie Fornell, Maj Gens Darryl Tripp, Richard Engle, Larry Fleming, Sam Westbrook, and me; and Brig Gens Richard Head, Robert Winger, Ed White, Garry Willard, and my other NKP roommate, Dick Dunwoody.²⁷

One of my 1st SOS colleagues and combat companions, then-Lieutenant Hukee, has created and maintained a remarkable website (<http://www.skyraider.org/>) that documents the A-1 combat experience in SEA, and has included his own combat journal describing the diverse set of missions that we flew. More recently, Hook has added to his outstanding documentation by publishing *USAF and VNAF A-1 Skyraider Units of the Vietnam War*, a thin but rich documentation of the Spad's combat role in SEA, published by Osprey Press.²⁸ In 2007, military aviation history author Wayne Mutza, added another outstanding book, *The A-1 Skyraider in Vietnam: The Spad's Last War*, by Schiffer Publishing.

The USAF Skyraider community gathers every other year for a fall reunion and enjoys the occasional visit and participation of some of our amazing crew chiefs, weapons and maintenance colleagues, and other support staff who kept a venerable

antique flying decades after it was first deployed. Also, we have been joined by a healthy number of our esteemed VNAF colleagues, many of whom have thousands of combat sorties and thousands of combat hours in the Skyraider, compared to our USAF statistics which measured in the hundreds. Additionally, we are always honored to see the occasional Raven, Jolly Green, Knife, Nail, Covey, King, and other colleagues with whom we flew and fought. Our most recent gathering in the fall of 2015 brought yet another special treat—the presence of a handful of General Pao's brave ground controllers, who forward-air-controlled our Skyraiders in Northern Laos for many years. We were honored to meet them face-to-face and visit with these heroes.

These days as our numbers and memories dwindle based on the march of time, we can still note, on a point of significance for our Air Force colleagues since Army Air Corps days in World War I, that the Skyraider pilots of USAF in Southeast Asia were privileged to fly in the very last propeller driven fighters in combat in our service. A nickel in the grass for all our fallen brothers in that war and others since but especially for those who flew our beloved Sandy SAR missions and Skyraider-style CAS and special operations missions, “up close and personal.” 🌟

Notes

1. For details on A-1 Skyraider models, development, and numbers of aircraft produced see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_A-1_Skyraider and Wayne Mutza, *The A-1 Skyraider in Vietnam: The Spad's Last War*, Schiffer Military History (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, April 2003).

2. The size of this pilot group who did not fly combat in the Skyraider can be estimated by comparing the number of graduates from the Hurlburt AFB, Florida training program, (www.skyraider.org/skassn/classpics/hurphot.htm) versus the numbers listed in the various A-1 squadrons over the years. While this math is anecdotal, it is verified by the actual membership of the A-1 Skyraider Association in four decades.

3. Richard Gabbert, *A Comparative Analysis of USAF Fixed Wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia Combat* (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH: Defense Technical Information Center, 1977), document number AFFDL-TR-77-115.

4. In addition to being etched on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, these 144 names are memorialized on a plaque at the A-1 Skyraider Memorial at Hurlburt Field, FL. See <http://www.skyraider.org/skyassn/menlost.htm>.

5. Gabbert, “A Comparative Analysis,” *Ibid.*, 39–42, 57–62.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Byron E. Hukee, *USAF and VNAF A-1 Skyraider Units of the Vietnam War*, Osprey Publishing, 2013, 53. For reference to the MISTY FAC program in the F-100, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forward_air_control_during_the_Vietnam_War#Fast_FAC_jet_aircraft, sect. 1.2.2, Fast FAC Jet Aircraft, and <http://mistyvietnam.com/>.

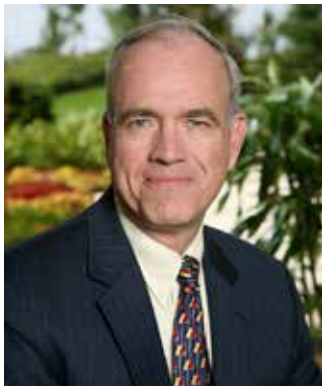
8. Gabbert, “A Comparative Analysis;” Earl H. Tilford Jr., *Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia: USAF in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2005); and Maj Russell G. Ochs, *The Evolution of USAF Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961–1968* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College), 22.

9. Kenny Wayne Fields, *The Rescue of Streetcar 304* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 306–308.

10. See http://tailspintopics.blogspot.com/2011_10_01_archive.html for a brief description and photos of the Yankee System installation and operation.

11. This calculation of the prior assignment sources for A-1 pilots is based on personal observation and discussion at many A-1 Skyraider reunions. Throughout the nine years and four squadrons of Skyraider pilots in Southeast Asia, this mix of previous reciprocating engine, Air Defense Command, Air Training Command instructors, and new undergraduate pilot training graduates, was reasonably consistent.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. See <http://aircommandoman.tripod.com/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nakhon_Phanom_Royal_Thai_Navy_Base for history and background on Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base and its units.
15. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/56th_Fighter_Wing and <http://aircommandoman.tripod.com/id3.html> for historical detail about the 56th ACW/SOW during the Vietnam conflict.
16. Christopher Robbins, *The Ravens: The Men Who Flew in America's Secret War in Laos* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1987); and Dr. Joe Leeker's history section, 2-3, http://det156sow.com/download/rlaf_t28s.pdf.
17. For insight into these covert operations, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Assistance_Command_Vietnam_%E2%80%933_Studies_and_Observations_Group.
18. See Son Tay Raid history and specifics at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Ivory_Coast.
19. The close relationship between A-1 pilots and Air America is not documented anywhere that I am aware of, but can be verified by attendance at any A-1 or Raven reunion, both of which are visited frequently by both former Air America aircrews and our Laotian brothers who fought for General Vang Pao.
20. Ibid.
21. Robbins, *The Ravens*. Also see the website at <http://www.ravens.org/>.
22. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_F._Fisher and <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=297>.
23. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_A._Jones,_III, Biography and Medal of Honor sections.
24. Ibid. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_A._Jones,_III. See Biography and Medal of Honor sections.
25. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LTV_A-7_Corsair_II, sect. 2.2, USAF A-7D.
26. The Air Training Command (ATC) honoring of this commitment can only be proven anecdotally, but in my personal accounting of General McBride's commitment and all the new pilots right out of undergraduate pilot training (UPT) and those who had been ATC instructor pilots previously, everyone returned to the ATC base and aircraft (T-37 or T-38) of their choice.
27. While our A-1 Skyraider Association has kept records of alumni for more than forty years, apologies if this list omits any retired flag officer who flew combat with us in the Skyraider.
28. Ibid., USAF and VNAF A-1 Skyraider Units.



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General Jayne (BA, USAFA; PhD, MIT) is a partner with Heidrick and Struggles, Inc., and a veteran of more than 34 years' service in the USAF and Air National Guard. In uniform, he served two combat tours in Southeast Asia—in the A-1 Skyraider and the F-4D Phantom—and flew as a combat-ready fighter pilot in the F-105, F-4E, and F-15 Eagle as well. He also served as the special assistant to assistant to the president for international economic affairs in the Nixon administration, a professional staff member in the National Security Council Defense Policy and Programs Division in the Ford and Carter administrations, and associate director, National Security and International Affairs in the Office of Management and Budget. The general flew as a T-38 jet instructor pilot, and was the first Air National Guard assistant to the commander of Air Force Space Command. The general is a retired executive in the aerospace industry, having served as the vice president and program manager for the F-15 Eagle, and the president of the Missile Systems Company at McDonnell Douglas. General Jayne is currently the chairman of the USAFA Endowment, the fundraising foundation for the Academy.

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