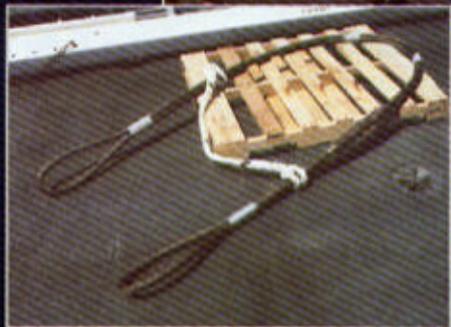
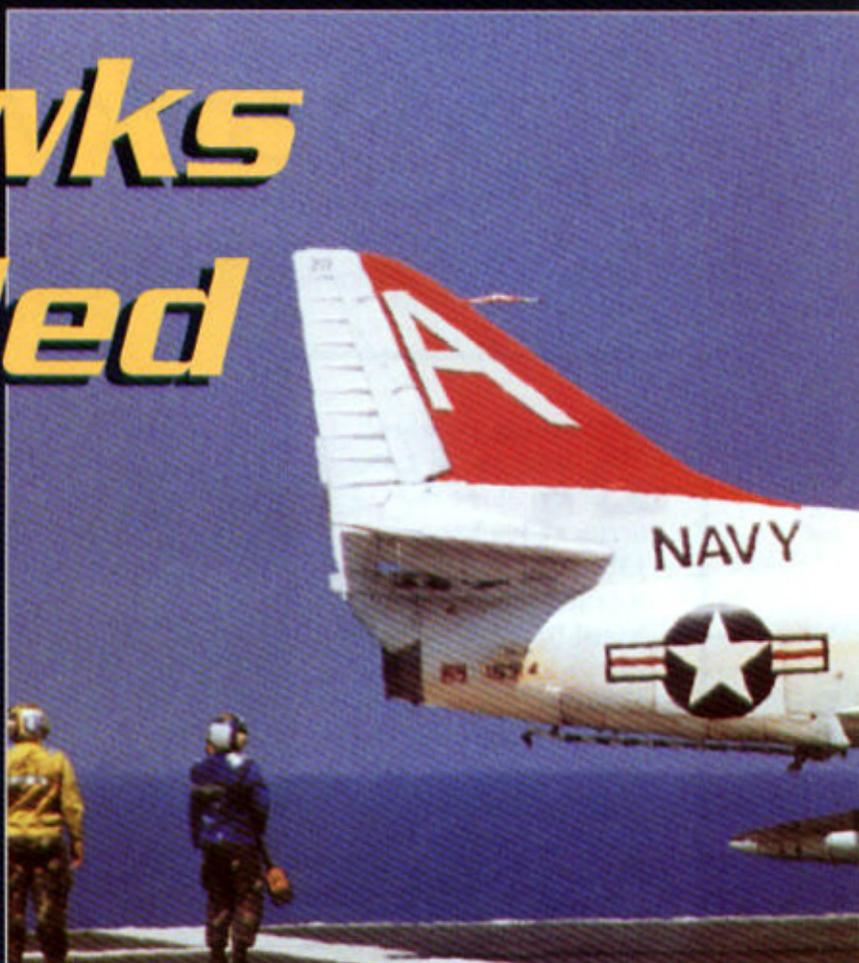


Skyhawks Unbridled

Photos by JO1 Joshua M. Hudson

The formal ceremony for the TA-4J Skyhawk's retirement from the training command was held in June at NAS Pensacola, Fla.; however, the TA-4J officially retired in September, handing over Navy advanced jet training to T-45 Goshawks. The VT-7 Eagles, NAS Meridian, Miss., had the honor of conducting carrier qualifications for the last time in the two-seat "Scooter." From the landing signal officer's platform aboard *George Washington* (CVN 73), instructors monitored and guided students in takeoffs and landings. The Skyhawks performed flawlessly, and with little fanfare the TA-4J entered Naval Aviation history as the Navy's last training aircraft to use a bridle to catapult from a carrier.

Special thanks to Richard Collens for his contributions to this article.



Clockwise from left, two crewmen prep the bridle harness for launch. The bridle, which attaches the catapult to the underside of the aircraft, assisted the last "cat" shot of a training command TA-4J. The aircraft flies great but has trouble parallel parking. A TA-4J traps aboard *George Washington* (CVN 73).

With the retirement of all training command TA-4Js, Fleet Composite Squadron 8 became the only Navy unit currently operating the aircraft.



In the beginning . . .

As documented in the September 1965 issue of *Naval Aviation News*, right, the first flight of the TA-4E, the twin-cockpit version of the *Skyhawk*, took place on 30 June 1965 at Douglas Aircraft Company's Palmdale, Calif., facility.

In May 1966 the first trainers, designated TA-4Fs, were delivered to Attack Squadron 125, NAS Lemoore, Calif. The use of the TA-4F helped accelerate the training of fleet pilots for Vietnam operations and released single-seat A-4 attack bombers for combat.



THE FIRST FLIGHT of the Douglas TA-4E Skyhawk took place on June 30 at Palmdale, Calif. The aircraft, featuring twin tandem cockpits, a zero-level ESCAPAC ejection system, a steerable nose wheel and wing spoilers, is programmed for delivery to the fleet in April 1966. Powered by a Pratt & Whitney J-52-P-8A (the same power plant used in the A-4A), the advanced jet trainer can get out 3,300 pounds of thrust with a maximum speed of Mach 1. The initial order of 25 will be assigned to replacement training squadrons.