

QUONSET STATE AIRPORT/QUONSET AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE

NAS Quonset Point was deactivated in 1974 and became Quonset Air National Guard Station. Next to NAS Quonset Point was the Naval Construction Battalion known as the Seabees. Quonset Point also gave its name to the Quonset Hut, a standardized temporary structure used by the U.S. military starting in World War II.

Quonset Air Museum was established in 1992 by then Gov. Bruce Sundlun to help preserve the state's aviation heritage. In March 2015, the Quonset Air Museum had the roof collapse under the weight of heavy snow and ice. None of the museum's archives or 28 aircraft were damaged, but the building was deemed unsafe by the Rhode Island Airport Corporation. In August 2016 the nonprofit dissolved and the aircraft were either going to be demolished or transferred to another museum or location.

The F-14A Tomcat was transported to the Naval Academy. An A-7 and a twin tail C-1A Trader were also transferred to new homes. The C-1A was a one of a kind aircraft that had been fitted with twin tails and radome (but without associated electronics) to serve as the aerodynamic prototype for the E-1 Tracer.

Many of the aircraft were sold as salvage. 155629 remained on the ramp at Quonset State Airport while Lenore Taylor, Aircraft Loan Manager, National Naval Aviation Museum (NNAM) tried to find it a new home. All Navy aircraft on display in museums are the property of NNAM and on loan to a museum that qualifies with NNAM's approval process.

FORT WORTH AVIATION MUSEUM

May 2017, Fort Worth Aviation Museum located on Meacham Int'l Airport tried to raise funds to transport 155629 from Quonset. With limited support from the Intruder community, the museum was unable to raise the necessary funds. Steve Dumovich, USMC A-6 Fire Control Tech, was a volunteer at FWAM and contacted some prior squadron mates. Intruders from Marine squadrons and a few from VA-34 made donations. Steve along with James Henshaw, Ronald Massey, Dick Bondi, Ben Moody, Gary Rezeau, Steve Jacobson, James Engstrom, Joel Watson and Charles Clark made donations.

DFW TAILHOOKERS ASSOCIATION

I attended the fantastic 2018 IA Reunion in Norfolk organized by Bill “Catfish” Davis and T Lad Webb. I knew previous VA-145 and VA-34 that lived in the Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex. Wanting to get together with fellow Intruders more often than every 2 years (or 4 years), I went to the Members Area tab on the Intruder Association website. Able to search for names within a distance of a Zip Code, I searched and found all members within 100 miles of my Zip Code.

Being a member of a Club Corp country club, I had access to 16 country clubs in the DFW area. Timarron County Club in Southlake near DFW Airport was centrally located. With the names and emails of 22 Navy Intruders, I organized a luncheon on July 10, 2018 attended by 13 Intruders and 6 wives, including Bill “Willis” and Jan Mullis from Va Beach. At the meeting, we decided to include Marine Intruders and all Navy and Marine Squadron veterans in the group and meet once a quarter for luncheons.



After this first luncheon, we became aware from Sandy “Rat Man” Sanford of the failed attempt of Fort Worth Aviation Museum to recover 155629. Mike “Schu” Schuster and John “JJ” Miller, DFWTH knew “Rat Man” from their 1970-73 tour in VA-75. “Rat Man” owns business Potomac River Enterprise Solutions, LLC (PRES). Some of PRES initiatives included inspecting Navy Aircraft on loan from Naval National Aviation Museum (NNAM) which “Rat Man” contracts with Lenore Taylor at NNAM to complete.



Looking in to taking on the project of moving 155629 from Quonset to DFW, I toured Fort Worth Aviation Museum (FWAM) with my daughter's father-in-law, John Tuthill. FWAM had some nice Navy and Marine aircraft, including a F-4 from VMFA-333 (featured in the movie "*The Great Santini*"). John was a member of VMFA-333 (Trip Trey) MCAS Beaufort, SC 1968-69. He then deployed to VMFA-122 based in Chu Lai where he flew 233 combat missions. In 1971, John returned to civilian life after an instructor tour in VT-25 Beeville, TX.

Because of the distance from my house to FWAM, I decided to contact Frontiers of Flight Museum (FOFM) at Dallas Love Field as a possible museum for 155629.

FRONTIERS OF FLIGHT MUSEUM (FOFM) DALLAS LOVE FIELD

In September 2018, I contacted FOFM Dan Steelman, VP of Collections & Exhibits, and Bob Welch, Curator, to determine if FOFM was interested in adding an A6E to their inventory of aircraft on display. FOFM agreed to accept 155629. DFW Tailhookers agreed to raise the necessary funds for disassembly, transport and reassembly at the museum. Since FOFM already had a LTV A-7B "Corsair II" and Chance-Vought RF-8G, they were on NNAM's approved list of museums.

September 4, 2018, a group of DFW Tailhookers meet at FOFM to discuss the project. The group was comprised of myself, Mike "Schu" Schuster, Larry "Panther" Walton, John "JJ" Miller, Bill Walters, Steve "Wonder" VanWie, John "JC" Lauer and Ray "Mad Dog" Allee. The committee was shown the possible display location for 155629.



In order to receive tax deductible donations, on September, 20 2018 I filed with the Secretary of State of Texas to form a Domestic Nonprofit Corporation named DFW Tailhookers Association and with the IRS for Tax Exempt 501(c)(3) status.



September 26, 2018, myself, President DFWTH, Mike Schuster (VP), John Miller (Director of Marketing), Larry Walton (Secretary) and Bill Walters (Treasurer) met to discuss details on the move. DFW Tailhookers started a campaign to collect pledges through our website (<https://dfwtailhookers.org/>) and with posters at local businesses. DFWTH also contacted possible corporate sponsors.

HELP SAVE THIS A-6 INTRUDER



SAVE THIS HISTORIC WORKHORSE OF
NAVAL AVIATION FOR 34 YEARS FOR
DISPLAY AT
"FRONTIERS OF FLIGHT MUSEUM"

SAVE FROM DEMOLISHING
AND BRING TO DALLAS
"FRONTIERS OF FLIGHT"
NEED DONATIONS GO TO:
WWW.DFWTAILHOOKERS.ORG

SCHEDULED TO BE DEMOLISHED
AT QUONSET POINT, RI. HELP A
GROUP OF LOCAL NAVY
INTRUDER AVIATORS TRANSPORT
TO "FRONTIERS OF FLIGHT"
WWW.DFWTAILHOOKERS.ORG

I contacted T Lad Webb, President of IA, for support. T Lad was very supportive making the first pledge. With support from IA Webmaster Jack "Cactus" Jordan with '99 Intruders, we received numerous pledges from IA members.

Icons of the IA community made pledges, including ADM "Zap" Zlatoper, RADM "Rupe" Owens, the late CAPT Jim "Lurch" Joyner and CAPT T. Lad Webb.

In my research, I discovered that the late Dave Austin and late Dick Toft had also ejected safely from an A-6B July 30, 1972. Dave Austin and I were roommates in AOCS, classmates in VT-10, roommates in VT-86 and traveled with my wife Kathy and Dave's wife Nancy from Texas to San Diego for training and SERE. We lived together in a Mission Bay Cottage then traveled up to Whidbey Island to go through VA-128 together. We lived next door in WWII cottages where both our first sons were born.



In 1983, Dave was killed in an accident while flying an Intruder off the USS Eisenhower. On the Sunday morning before she received word about the accident, Nancy said, she had been about to leave the couple's apartment for church when friends in the A-6 squadron invited her to their home for "a glass of wine." They already knew about the mishap, and gently informed the widow, then age 34 and married to Austin for 14 years. Only two days before the crash he had been promoted to Commander.

After the accident, Nancy's friends in the Intruder community quickly shifted gears from celebration to offering comfort. "That's what Naval aviation is about," she said. "It is a family."

I contacted Nancy Austin Fetterman and told her "155629 would be dedicated to the widows of those Intruders who perished flying the mighty A-6 Intruder"

I had two old squadron mates living in Rhode Island. Pete Rice (VA-145) in Newport and Mike “Ziggy” Steinmetz (VA-34) at the time was serving in the Cabinet of RI as State Cybersecurity Officer & Homeland Security Advisor. Both went to Quonset State Airport to take photos of 155629.



Mike “Ziggy” Steinmetz photo

We continued to collect pledges while the DFWTH Committee researched the funds required to disassemble at Newport, transport and reassemble in Dallas. DFWTH also picked up an additional member, Don Rhoads a Jet Mechanic with Southwest Airlines (SWA). Don was an AD-3 in VA-36 when T Lad was CO VA-36. Don had been involved in the Ft Worth Aviation Museum effort and had traveled to Quonset to see 155629.

Ken “Smo” Smolana, VA-34 BN and CO VAQ-140, ECMO had recently moved to DFW and joined DFWTH. “Smo” served as Strike Test Directorate (VX-23) for the A-6E Composite Re-wing Program and was very familiar with the composite wing. 155629 had gone through the re-wing program. There was a lot of discussion with experts in the Intruder community, including Clyde Cain, IA member and retired Grumman Tech Rep, about whether the wing could be cut or removed at the fuselage.

The decision was made to plan on transportation with outer wings removed at the wing fold. If transported at the wing fold, the aircraft would be 25 feet wide for transportation and require “wide” load expenses if trucked. Those expenses would include a site survey of the route, chase cars in both front and back of the truck, limited times of day for travel and police escort in some areas.

The team researched other methods of transporting including barge and rail.

John “JC” Lauer, VMA-332 pilot, wrote a letter to the then Secretary of Defense James Mattis for military transport support. In October, I talked on the phone to COL Robert Cooper, EA/COS Deputy Commandant for Aviation.



September 12, 2018

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
Washington, DC 20301-3010

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to notify you that a workhorse of Naval Aviation is scheduled to be destroyed on October 28th, 2018. An A6 Intruder with 34 years of service supporting Naval and Marine forces has been on display at Quonset Point, RI. The closure of the display has relegated this A6 to one of two fates... being moved to a viable teaching display or being reduced to razor blade stock.

A group of men, who have served in the Navy and/or Marine Corps, working directly with this iconic aviation resource either flying, maintaining, or serving in squadrons have come together to Save This A6 Intruder. It is evident that we now have to seek a higher level of involvement to accomplish our mission.

Our assessment indicates that to be successful, \$60,000 needs to be raised to finance the disassembly, transportation, reassembly of Bureau No. 155629 to display quality status.

An additional option for consideration can be the direct involvement of current military assets that if brought to bear could accomplish our mission to save a piece of Naval Aviation.

Tasking a military Heavy Lift Unit to engage in 'Training Exercise Intruder' to relocate this workhorse from Quonset Point, RI, to the Frontiers Of Flight Museum (DFW) will 'Save The A6'. It will provide a real world problem for a Heavy Lift Unit to exercise. This is a win-win scenario.

During the course of the mission, we stand ready to consult with the Department of Defense regarding any methodological and policy questions that may arise. I look forward to our collaboration on this important issue.

Our point of contact is Bob Champney, Director, DFW Tailhookers. Mr. Champney can be reached at info@dfwtailhookers.org and (214) 546-8020.

Semper Fi,

SAVE THIS HISTORIC WORKHORSE
NAVAL AVIATION FOR 34 YEARS FOR
DISPLAY AT
"FRONTIERS OF FLIGHT MUSEUM"

Save the A-6 phone conversation

Mr. Champney,

It was a pleasure to speak with you today. Your organization's efforts to save the A-6 is truly admirable. Although we can't source a heavy lift unit to support at this time, your thoughts on a shorter lift from the museum to a rail yard have merit and are worth pursuing. Please keep us informed on the progress. Even if we can't justify DoD support due to fiscal constraints, we at HQMC Aviation Department are 100% in concurrence that the A-6 needs to be saved. Happy to stay in touch on this or any other matter. All the best.

Very Respectfully,

Yank

Colonel Robert D. Cooper

RADM Jim “Gramps” Lair was retired living in Fort Worth. Scott “Beachball” Beach and myself were Assistant and Strike Ops on USS America when “Gramps” was CO. He had connections with some previous MAC Generals and previously had the F-14 at Fort Worth Aviation Museum flown in by C-5. Unfortunately, it was at the time of Hurricane Michael striking Panama City and Tyndall AFB. So no assets were available. “Gramps” joined DFW Tailhookers as Director Emeritus.

The team contacted Charles “Chuckmo” Mosely, All Coast Aircraft Recovery, who had bid for the FWAM move. The bid for surface transportation was almost \$200,000 total counting disassemble and reassembly.

We then contacted Worldwide Aircraft Recovery, Bellevue, NE. Unfortunately, Marty Batura's team was involved in a move of a TWA Super Connie from Maine to NYC.



The Connie was converted into a lounge at the TWA Hotel at JFK Airport.



Step onto the TWA Hotel's tarmac — and back into 1958

Scott "Beachball" Beach, Lockheed Martin F-35 Air Ship Integration, set up a meeting with a Lockheed Martin trucking company SEKO Aerospace & Aviation to work up an at cost bid transportation bid.



At the November 21, 2018 meeting were John "JJ" Miller, Bill Walters, Mike "Schu" Schuster, Scott "Beachball" Beach and Bob "Southwind" Sutherlin and myself.

After reviewing the bidding it was evident that the costs of relocation from Rhode Island to Texas were beyond our fundraising capabilities. The decision was made to cancel the project. On January 22, 2019 as President of DFW Tailhookers, I sent email to “Saving 155629 Supporters” that with heavy heart DFW Tailhookers has to announce that their 7 month project is being terminated. Thanks for the \$60,000 in pledges from \$50 to \$5000 from hundreds of supporters.

HICKORY AVIATION MUSEUM, HICKORY NC

In November 2019, I saw a post in the Facebook A-6 Intruder Association Group that 155629 was going to be moved to Hickory Aviation Museum. I contacted Kyle Kirby at the museum and he confirmed that they planned on moving 155629 to Hickory.

Saving money in ground transportation, Hickory made the decision and had the expertise to cut the wing at the wing butt. COVID prevented them from making the move until October 1, 2021 when 155629 was finally saved from Quonset and transported to Hickory, NC.



Hickory Aviation Museum (HAM) is going to set up a link for restoration pledges for 155629. Their phone is 828 323-1963.



HAM will need Intruders' support to restore this only A-6E on display that was once capable of firing a Standard ARM (AGM-78). Pledges from those who flew 155629, were a member of VA-34 or fired an AGM-78 from an A-6B will certainly be appreciated by HAM.