

VA-23 MIDWAY A-4F Dedication Ceremony



Sponsored by: VA-23 and USNA Classes of 1959 & 1963

VA-23 MIDWAY A-4F Dedication Ceremony

<u>Invocation</u>	<i>Deacon Bill Gilchrist</i>
<u>Welcome/Introduction</u>	<i>Mo Peelle</i>
<u>LCDR Gosen Remembrances</u>	
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Art Merz (59)</i>
<i>Remarks</i>	<i>John Gosen (son)</i>
<u>LT Smiley Remembrances</u>	
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Don Freese (63)</i>
<i>Remarks</i>	<i>Attendees</i>
<u>Flag Presentations</u>	<i>Bill Gilchrist, Dick Dellwo</i>
<u>Remarks on Navy VN Flight Operations</u>	<i>Mike Cronin</i>
<u>Benediction</u>	<i>Dick Dellwo</i>
<u>Reception</u>	<i>Attendees</i>

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A-4F Background Data:

The A4F was the seventh variant of the basic A4 Skyhawk and was first flown in combat by VA squadrons from Carrier Air Wing Nineteen deployed to Vietnam in 1968 aboard USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14). The aircraft has a wing span was 27'6", a fuselage length of 40' 3", a fuselage height of 15' and an empty weight of 10,448 lbs. The aircraft is equipped with four wing stations and a centerline fuselage station all of which can carry a wide variety of air-to-air and/or air-to-ground weapons for whatever mission was assigned. The aircraft is also capable of carrying an Inflight Refueling Store (Buddy Store) on the centerline station which enabled it to serve as an inflight refueling tanker. With a full load of fuel and weapons, the aircraft's maximum take-off weight was 24,500 lbs which required reaching a catapult airspeed of 155 knots. The maximum level airspeed was 673 knots. For carrier arrested landings at the maximum landing weight of 14,000 lbs, the A4F approached the ship at 128 knots. Of the 2,960 A4 Skyhawks produced from 1954 to 1979, 146 were A-4Fs.

VA-23 Black Knights Historical Summary

The Black Knights of VA-23 had a 21 year reign from February 1959 to April 1970. During this tenure the squadron flew the FJ-4B Fury and three variants of the A-4 Skyhawk on eight deployments to the Western Pacific, the last four during the VN conflict. The Black Knights were awarded three Navy Unit Commendations, Five Armed Forces Expeditionary Medals, One Military Unit Commendation and the Vietnam Service Medal with 16 stars.

VA-23 VN Combat Losses:

The Black Knights lost eight aircraft and five pilots during four VN combat cruises. Two squadron pilots were POWs.

VN Navy Attack Aircraft Combat Losses/POWs:

The Navy lost more A-4 aircraft (52% of total) and pilots (39%) in the VN conflict than from any other attack aircraft.

Aircraft Type	Aircraft Lost	Aircrew/Pilots KIA	Aircrew/Pilot POWs
A-4	271	98	48
A-7	99	30	7
A-1	65	34	3
A-6	86	92	23
Totals	521	254	81

VA-23 and USS MIDWAY:

VA-23 made five deployments to the Western Pacific on the USS Midway. One cruise, from March to November 1965, was made during the VN conflict.

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Lieutenant Commander Larry Gosen, USN



LCDR Gosen was born in 1938 in Bingham Lake, Minnesota, the youngest of twelve children. He entered the Naval Academy in 1955 and graduated with the class of 1959. LCDR Gosen entered naval flight training after graduation and was designated a Naval Aviator in October 1960. He received orders to VAW-11 in San Diego, where he flew E-1B Airborne Early Warning aircraft and made three deployments on board the USS Ranger (CVA-61). LCDR Gosen was assigned to the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, CA, awarded a Masters Degree in Electrical Engineering, and in 1965, reported to the Naval Academy where he taught electrical engineering courses. He completed jet transition training as a Fleet Replacement Pilot in VA-125 at NAS Lemoore, CA and reported to Attack Squadron Twenty Three (VA-23) in the Spring of 1968 flying the A4F aircraft.

VA-23 was assigned to Attack Carrier Air Wing Nineteen (CVW-19) and in December 1967 began a combat deployment to the Vietnam theater of operations on board the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14). On the morning of 23 July 1968, which was scheduled to be the final day of combat flights, LCDR Gosen was assigned as LCDR Bill Gilchrist's wingman for a strike into North Vietnam. Shortly after his catapult launch his aircraft impacted the water forward of the ship. LCDR Gosen did not eject. A search was conducted in the area but LCDR Gosen's body was not recovered.

LCDR Gosen was awarded several Strike Flight Air Medals, the National Defense Service Medal and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

LCDR Gosen was survived by his wife Patricia, son John, and daughters Stephanie, Leigh and Kriss.

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Lieutenant Stan Smiley, USN



LT Smiley was born in 1939 into a military family. He entered the U.S. Naval Academy in 1959 and graduated with the class of 1963. LT Smiley entered naval flight training after graduation, was designated a Naval Aviator on 4 February 1965, and received orders to VS-25 where he flew S-2E ASW aircraft. From September to November 1967 he completed jet transition training and subsequently joined VA-23 to fly the A-4F Skyhawk.

VA-23 was assigned to CVW-19 and in April 1969 began a deployment to the western Pacific on board the USS Oriskany (CVA-34). On the afternoon of 20 July 1969, LT Smiley launched as the lead of a two-aircraft flight on a road reconnaissance mission over Laos. While returning from the initial mission, LT Smiley sighted a truck and told his wingman that he was going to confirm whether it was rolling stock or a hulk. As the wingman prepared to follow his flight leader in an attack, he saw LT Smiley's aircraft enter into a shallow dive about 60 degrees off the planned attack heading. The aircraft crashed. Subsequent airborne search and rescue operations were unsuccessful; there was no sign that LT Smiley ejected from his aircraft. A ground search was not feasible due to enemy forces in the area. LT Smiley was declared Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered.

LT Smiley was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, an Air Medal with Strike Flight numeral "8," the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V", the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with two bronze stars, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

LT Smiley was survived by his parents and a brother.