

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.

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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 cockpit, a zero-level ESCAPAC ejection system, a retractable 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 9,300 pounds of thrust with a maximum speed of Mach 1. The initial order of 25 will be assigned to replacement training squadrons.