

The Call Goes Out. It is Time for Reunion.

THUNDERBIRDS

SUMMER 2003 Volume 6

www.tbaa.org

Fifty Years of Thunder - A Golden Celebration



The first 50 years of the Thunderbirds will be history in a few short months. You will soon receive your 50th anniversary reunion package that sets the agenda for our November 20-22 celebration.

We have moved golf to Thursday in Henderson at a 5-star course called Anthem. That afternoon we hold our Hangar Reception, hosted by the current Team. Finally, after several years, our home will be open to us during reunion, and the active Team can tell us how it's done now.

Our alumna and active sister birds will hold a mini-gathering following this event. We will give you specific details in your reunion package upon arrival. Contact Debby Baer Becker at DBBecker2@shaw.ca for questions.

That same evening we head to the respective clubs for our customary Officers' and NCO Calls.

Friday's activities include a trip back to Nellis for the 50th Anniversary Air Show; then comes the Friday night Cocktail Reception at Caesars Palace.

Saturday morning's TBAA business meeting at Caesars will leave time midday for you to attend the Book Signing Party or relax and visit with teammates prior to the gala Saturday night Anniversary Banquet.

Your invitation will also include rental car and bus information for transportation to the various events. Dollar Rent-A-Car has special rates and can be contacted on the web at www.dollar.com or at 1-800 800-0044. Mention promotional code #CON67.

American Airlines rates can be obtained by calling 1-800 433-1790 and mention promotional code #A68N3AD.

Caesars Palace rooms can be reserved at 1-800 634-6661 and mention: "Thunderbirds Reunion."

(continued on page 2)



"Natural Nobility," a metal eagle sculpted by blacksmith Rick Prazen, calls for Thunderbirds to gather in their hangar.

(continued from page 1)

We hope that you will be able to join us for this historic event that you helped make possible. Today's exciting Thunderbird team sets the stage for the next 50 years. Make plans now. We'll see you in November!

For additional information, contact Jerry Jones (Ground Radio, 65-69), Reunion Committee Chairman at (702) 616-0277, tbird@lvcn.com or tbird13@cox.net or Doris Wilson, (702) 871-7197, doewilson@aol.com.

Bench Stock



• **Hoot Gibson** (Leader 61-63) was inducted into the Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame Saturday, April 5, 2003, at the Pima Air & Space Museum, Tucson, Arizona. A highly decorated veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, he is America's third jet ace, shooting down five MiG-15s in his F-86 and probably destroying or damaging five others. Hoot held numerous key posts in the United States, Europe and Southeast Asia during his 31-year Air Force career. He led the Team to 40 states and 14 Central and South American countries.

The Aviation Hall of Fame wrote, "Korean jet ace, leader of the USAF Thunderbirds, Hoot Gibson is a hero's hero and no one better exemplifies the true American spirit, nor is more deserving of enshrinement in the Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame than Ralph D. 'Hoot' Gibson."

http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/local/archive/03/4_4_03aviation.html

• **Brad Appleby** (Phase/QA) 93-95 is the new president of the Boulder City, Nev., Chamber of Commerce

• **Joe Barron** (1st Sgt. 95-98) is command chief for the Air Warfare Center at Nellis.

• **Dan Darnell** (C/L 92-93) is now commander, Space Warfare Center, Schriever AFB, Colo. During his change-of-command ceremony at Nellis Air Force Base, Darnell was awarded the Bronze Star for his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Legion of Merit for his service at Nellis.

• **Johnny Weida** (Slot 89-90) is commandant of cadets, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo.

• **Joe Lamarca** (PAO 90-92) has relocated to Patrick AFB, Fla., as commander of 45th Mission Support Squadron.

• **Jim Jannette** (PAO 79-82) was promoted to chief of staff of the Space Foundation headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colo.

• **John Bourguignon** (Maint. Control 75-77) and Cecile were married March 1, 2003.

• **Carl Buhler** (Maint. Off. 97-98) is the new commander of the 57th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Nellis.

• **Kevin Gruenwald** (Photo 97-01) is the NCOIC of the Nellis photo lab.

• **Rob Givens** (RW 97-98) has assumed command of the Wolf Pack's 35th Fighter Squadron at Kunsan Air Base, Korea.

Lately, some great articles have been written about the Team.

Airman Magazine, April 2003

"Practicing for Perfection"

<http://www.af.mil/news/airman/0403/tbird.html>

Airman Magazine, May 2003

"Wearing 'The Patch'"

<http://www.af.mil/news/airman/0503/thunder.html>

"A Thunderbird of the Opposite Sex"

<http://www.af.mil/news/airman/0503/thunds2.html>

Las Vegas Review Journal, June 5, 2003

"Through The Eyes of a Leader," in-depth interview with Brig. Gen. Dan Darnell

http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2003/Jun-05-Thu-2003/news/21471316.html

Air Force, June 2003

"Thunderbirds at 50"

<http://www.afa.org/magazine/june2003/0603Tbirds.pdf>

Attention Phantom Phlyers, Phixers, Phriends

Does the number 66-0294 sound familiar? On April 30, 1972, the F-4E recovered to Phan Rang Air Base with a tree limb hanging from its right wing. It then flew to Hill AFB for major repairs where they removed the radar and M-61 cannon and replaced them with lead ballast. From there it flew to McDonnell in St. Louis where they painted it in Thunderbird livery and then to the Thunderbird line in 1973. When the F-4s were pulled from team service, 294, stripped of its show colors, went to the Test and Evaluation Center at Edwards. It eventually wound up at DM to await the crusher. But that didn't happen. The airplane now sits alone in front of American Legion Post 109 in Corona-de-Tucson, Arizona, its Thunderbird colors a memory covered by fading white and international orange paint.

Then comes Cali Knowlden, a 15-year-old ball of fire in a green Girl Scout uniform. Her plan is to restore 294 to its Thunderbird glory. She heads for the nearest help: Dick and Dee Pfeiffer. Suckers that they are for little girls with big wishes, Dick and Dee said "yes,"



which ultimately led to a call to the TR editor to beg for space in this issue. "Mop Boy" Pfeiffer is a good – no excellent – whiner." Dick priced Emron, looked into EPA requirements and

Restoring F-4s isn't all Cali Knowlden does. She (left) and Megan Lamb of Girl Scout Troop No. 468 restore Thunderbird scrapbooks for viewing at our 50th Anniversary Reunion.

solicited the help of Shayne Meder-Donnell, 1996 Honorary Crew Chief, who is helping to develop a plan and budget to put the scallops back on 294. While Dick – who has never worked on an F-4 in his life – thrashed about, Cali wrote, “Each day that this Thunderbird is not helped, a piece of our American heritage deteriorates along with it. What better way to show our American patriotism and save a part of our history than to restore this symbol of freedom and pride?”

So, fellow Eph Phour types and Brother Birds, get involved. Two-nine-four is one of us and part of our legacy. Visit the Web site at michael-t.com/post109 or watch tbaa.org for upcoming info on the project. You may also e-mail Dick Pfeiffer (CC 75-77) at Habumech@msn.com.

Thunderbird Alumni Serve in Operation Iraqi Freedom



Photo by Jason Haag (ComRel/Media 99-02) on the outskirts of Talil.

Thunderbird alumni have been part of every war since World War II, and Operation Iraqi Freedom is no different. Our alumni participated in operations throughout the region providing everything from operations and maintenance support of F-16s, Predators and Joint Stars to public affairs support.

When operations commenced on March 19, Dan Darnell (C/L 92-93) was the combined air and space operations director in the Combined Air Operations Center in Southwest Asia. He monitored and directed joint search and rescue,

theater missile defense, time-sensitive targeting (TST), battlefield coordination, special operations support, sortie execution and other mission-critical operations. “What was aired on live television was a microcosm of what was going on in the rest of the country,” he said in a recent interview. Boss Darnell was part of history as remote-controlled Predator spy planes were sometimes operated through satellite links from control points in the United States.

TST, one of the Air Force’s top priorities since the Gulf War, is the equivalent of a floating football linebacker, keeping eyes on the field and ready to sack the enemy at a moment’s notice. In Iraq, this linebacker focused on a field stretching about 500 miles wide and 700 miles long. Dan’s quarterback in the TST cell was his Thunderbird left wingman, Jeff Rochelle. Their biggest play in the game came April 7.

On that day, Jeff and his team redirected a B-1B Lancer from the 28th Bomb Wing to western Baghdad after coalition forces received a tip that a large number of Iraqi leaders and possibly Saddam Hussein were meeting at a Mansur neighborhood restaurant. “It was 8 minutes from the order until bombs were in the air,” Dan said.

In addition to Dan and Jeff, other Thunderbirds served in Iraqi Freedom. Joe Lamarca (PAO 92-93) was the Central Air Forces deputy director of public affairs. Rob Givens (RW 97-98) was the operations officer for an F-16 squadron stationed at Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait.

Although it was difficult to determine as of press time the exact number of alumni who participated in Iraqi Freedom, Thunder Rolls is aware that the following individuals served or continue to serve in the area of operations: CMSgt. Bruce Voigt, CMSgt. Ted Field, TSgt. Scott Hooks, SSgt. Jason Haag, SSgt. Bill Kurek, TSgt. Rob Russ and me.

– Chuck Ramey

First Thunderbird To Wear The Patch in Combat?



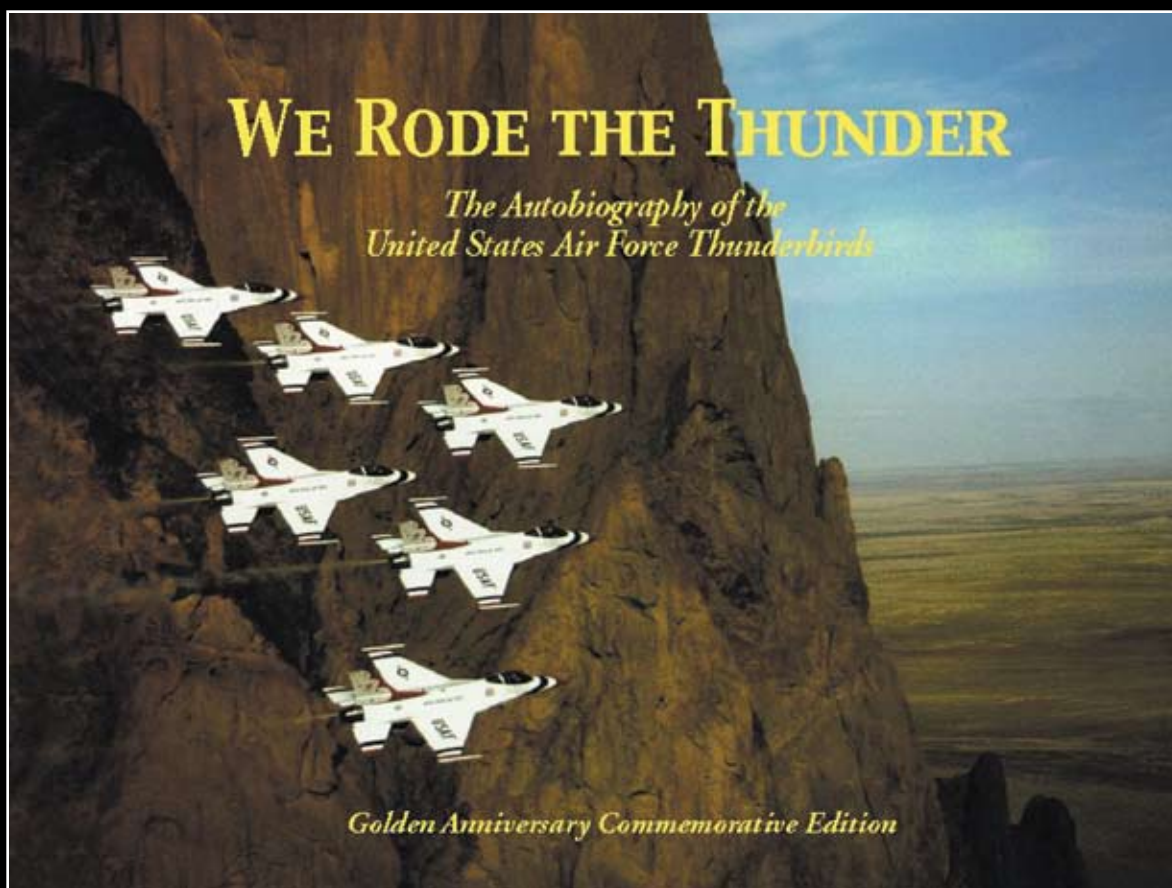
Rob McCain flies the colors in a combat zone.

As active and alumni Thunderbirds, we not only display the pride, power and precision of the U.S. Air Force, but also enthusiastically support our war-fighting comrades. We don’t believe that any Thunderbird has ever before been called to serve in a combat zone while assigned to the Team.

In February, Rob McCain (Ground Radio Specialist) was handpicked to deploy to Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB), Saudi Arabia, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

Before his selection to the team, Rob was a Ground Radio Maintenance Craftsman at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. While assigned to the 609th Air Communications Squadron, he deployed to PSAB supporting Operations Enduring Freedom and Southern Watch. While at PSAB during this deployment, Rob single-handedly built and assembled a high-frequency communications system used for air picture and voice transmissions. This one-of-a-kind platform revolutionized air-to-ground radio interface and proved to be a crucial element to the success of operational sorties. As a result of his work, Rob was recalled back to Saudi Arabia when OIF began – while he was on the Team. Along with other achievements, the system Rob helped design is credited for enabling the longest B-1 bombing mission ever. We were all proud of the power and precision the Air Force demonstrated during OIF, but having a Thunderbird contribute to the success is even more rewarding. Rob will receive an extension to his Team assignment equivalent to the length of his deployment. Well done, Brother Bird.

– Sean Cotter, Executive Officer, Active Team



We Rode the Thunder

“It took me back to the camaraderie of the Team, to the mission, to the exceptional people. It will take you back too; I guarantee it!”

–Mods Modleski (Solo 96-97)

“Quite the emotional roller coaster; definitely a two-hankie read.”

– Jody Roberts, (Admin. 88-91)

“I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the final review of the 50th anniversary book. Being a nitpicker for historical facts, I am always on the lookout for the exaggeration of overzealous authors. I can report to the alumni and the Team that what I found was an absolutely first-rate manuscript. I know each and every person who has been on the Team, or has had contact with the Team, will be touched by the personal anecdotes of sacrifice, solace, dedication and reward. The book is a great read for aviators as well as those involved or interested in aviation. The photographs of people and airplanes are splendidly choreographed for each aircraft’s era. The authors and others who gave of their time are to be highly commended for providing a memorable look back on 50 years of excitement, pride,

turmoil, exhilaration and deep emotion. This book will be a treasure in anybody’s home.”

– Tom Swalm (C/L 70-72)

Thank you alumni and friends for more than 700 pre-production orders! Your collector’s edition will be shipped to you soon and will be signed by our first commander/leader, Smokey Catledge, if all goes according to plan. After several production delays, our book is at the printer...where there has been more delay. Keep the faith. It’s on the way. Check www.tbaa.org for updates on its progress.

Although the commemorative edition is no longer available, you can still order *We Rode the Thunder* by visiting the publisher’s Web site www.MTPublishing.com or from the link on our new alumni Web site www.tbaa.org. The book will be available later in the year through book stores and aviation museums, but the TBAA benefits if you order directly from the publisher.

Any questions or comments? Contact Dee at (520) 647-3426, deepfeiffer@hotmail.com.

Bob Gore, Carol Knotts and I hope you ENJOY!

– Dee Pfeiffer (Supply 76-77)

Thunder Rolls Interviews

Jody Roberts (Admin. 88-91), Our Corporate Secretary

TR: There is a myth that the board comprises only officers.

JR: Where is my commission, then? The majority of TBAA directors are enlisted.

TR: What is the breakdown of TBAA membership?

JR: Although it fluctuates monthly, there are 1,782 patch-wearing members as of December 31, 2002. The breakdown is as follows:

- 409 (22.95 percent) Lifetime members including six making optional payments
- 143 (8.02 percent) Active members to include those just leaving the Team
- 346 (19.42 percent) Inactive
- 644 (36.14 percent) Lost
- 112 (6.28 percent) Deceased
- 2 (.12 percent) Removed at member's request
- 126 (7.07 percent) Active Team members.

TR: How about Lifetime memberships?

JR: As of June 24 this year, we have 465 Lifetime members. Prior to 1993 we had 223. Between then and 1999, 88 joined for an average of 12 per year. Between 2000 and now, 143 have become Lifetime for an annual average of 41 ... and that does not include the reunion “bump” that should take place at the end of this year.

TR: Why do you think we've had a significant increase in Lifetime enrollment?

JR: We have set up several communication systems – including this new, wonderful *Thunder Rolls* – to answer questions and address many issues. These things tie us together and provide our members value for their dues.

TR: What is the status of our Lifetime membership endowment?

JR: Funds in the endowment, or corpus, are invested with the Paine Webber brokerage firm in Las Vegas. We constantly explore ways to improve the portfolio's return.

TR: Do dues subsidize reunion?

JR: No. In 1998 and 2000 the membership told the board that operating capital from dues was not to subsidize reunion. We are looking for corporate sponsorships and other donations to offset the costs.

TR: How does money coming into the association get placed?

JR: Funds sent to the organization by donors or contributors may contain a restriction, or the board of directors may designate

where those funds go. For example, if someone contributes \$100 to support the active Team, the TBAA will track those funds so that an audit will show how that money was spent. In most cases, money coming into the organization carries no restrictions, so we may use it at our discretion. Lifetime dues are designated as prescribed by our bylaws. These dollars cannot be used for operating expenses because once a person pays lifetime, the only cash flow we have to service his membership is from the earnings of the corpus.

TR: Is our organization financially sound?

JR: Based on net worth, yes. Based on annual unrestricted cash flow, no. There is no guarantee that industry will contribute funds as they do now. We need to wean ourselves from them for operating expenses; put those dollars into special projects and scholarships. If for any reason, the companies write us out of their budget, we're out of business. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our cash flow. One way is to encourage those who are inactive to become active members and to help locate the more than 600 members being carried on the TBAA Lost List, which is over 50 percent of our members. If 400 of those 990 inactive or lost members joined the TBAA, we would eliminate our annual cash flow issues. A tall order for sure.

TR: Do you have a plan to get us to this state of solvency?

JR: We project about \$275,000 is needed in an investment fund to generate enough annual interest in addition to membership dues to support the organization without the assistance of industry or outside commercial sponsorship. Our fund currently has a balance of \$111,000. Our plan to regain solvency – without industry's help – is to continue to improve the TBAA.

TR: Does the TBAA reimburse board members and volunteers for expenses?

JR: No, but we do have operating expenses including salary for our administrative secretary, office expenses and supplies, mailing costs, etc. A good example is the postage for TR.

TR: What's the challenge to keeping us viable?

JR: We need more volunteers to spread the workload. We need every member pulling their weight by paying dues so that we can continue having reunions, newsletters, and databases to keep up with 1,800 members. Once a Thunderbird – Always a Thunderbird should mean that each person carries his or her own weight just like they did when they wore the Patch.

Correction: In “Evolution” (Spring 2003, Volume 5), we incorrectly stated that the first Thunderbird F-100 air show was in 1957. It was 1956. We also wrote that an occasional gap filler was provided by John Burley, which should have read John Bartley. *Thunder Rolls* is a historical document. If we goof, please let us know. – Ed

Once a Thunderbird, Always a Thunderbird!

Make It Stand for More Than Bragging Rights

Our association is looking for a few good men and women to step forward and help run the organization the next 2 years. The board has directors and other positions to fill following reunion in November. Contact Matt Byrd (RW 93-94) at (972) 577-5590, matt.byrd@ps.net or Dan Cherry (C/L 77-78) at (270) 781-9684, dancherry@insightbb.com

Book Signing Party

Bring your books written about the Thunderbirds or books written by Thunderbirds to get them signed at our book signing party during reunion. The time is tentatively scheduled immediately following the Saturday morning business meeting in the hospitality room.

Below is a list of books that you may want to try and find for your collection.

Books about the Thunderbirds

<i>The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds</i>	Jack Williams, 1956 (Republic Aviation)
<i>Thunderbirds!</i>	Martin Caidin, 1961, updated 1968 (out of print)
<i>Star-Spangled Jets</i>	P. L. Penney, 1968 (out of print)
<i>Diamond In The Sky</i>	C. A. Knotts & Pete Moore, 1978, updated 1984 (out of print)
<i>The Thunderbirds: Performers in Uniform</i>	Peter B. Mohn, 1980 (children's)
<i>The Thunderbirds</i>	George Sullivan, 1986 (young reader)
<i>Summer Thunder</i>	Brian Shul, 1993
<i>We Rode the Thunder</i>	TBAA, 2003 (available through www.MTPublishing.com)

Books written by Thunderbirds

Jack Broughton	<i>Thud Ridge</i> , 1969 (out of print)
Dennis R. Weddle	<i>I Would Have Gave My Life</i> , 1978 (out of print)
Bill Pogue	<i>Astronaut Primer</i> , 1985 (out of print)
William R. Pogue	<i>How Do You Go To The Bathroom In Space?</i> , 1985,'91,'99
Jack Broughton	<i>Going Downtown</i> , 1988 (out of print)
Bill Pogue	<i>The Trikon Deception</i> , 1992 (out of print)
Sam Johnson	<i>Captive Warriors</i> , 1992
Bill Creech	<i>The Five Pillars of TQM</i> , 1994
Bob Gore	<i>Rhombus</i> , 2000
Bill Pogue and Ben Bova	<i>Space Trivia</i> , 2003

(visit www.collectspace.com to order and receive a copy from Bill Pogue signed with the pen that traveled over 100 million miles with him on Sky Lab.)

If we have inadvertently missed a book about the Team or one you have written, please let us know. – Ed



www.tbaa.org

The TBAA has reentered cyberspace thanks to Tom Smith (Art Dir 97-00) and Dylan Hulbert (Avionics/COSO 96-98).

TBAA.org is the second Web site designed to reach out to the entire association. A previous site existed in the mid- to late-1990s but was limited and disappeared. Seeing a void and realizing that many people rely on the Internet and e-mail as primary sources to quickly gather information, the duo felt it was their duty to build a virtual home for their brother and sister birds.

“We’re in our infancy and want to get all Thunderbirds on the alumni list and into our bulletin board so everyone can reconnect,” says Dylan, who originally built a similar site to keep in touch with his active teammates. “By using the bulletin board feature,

we can have some lengthy interaction between members from different eras.”

Since the site’s inception, more than 100 alumni have registered and many have probably reconnected with old friends. But Tom and Dylan’s goal is a site that is more than just a virtual alumni association directory and chat room.

“Long term we want to see *TBAA.org* become the one-stop source of information for all official Thunderbird data – past and present,” Tom said. “When I was on the active team, I would learn something different and new every time an alumnus visited the hangar. This information is extremely important because it corrects the mistakes in our history, which is something they learn in the 21-day program. It’s what they remember for life.”

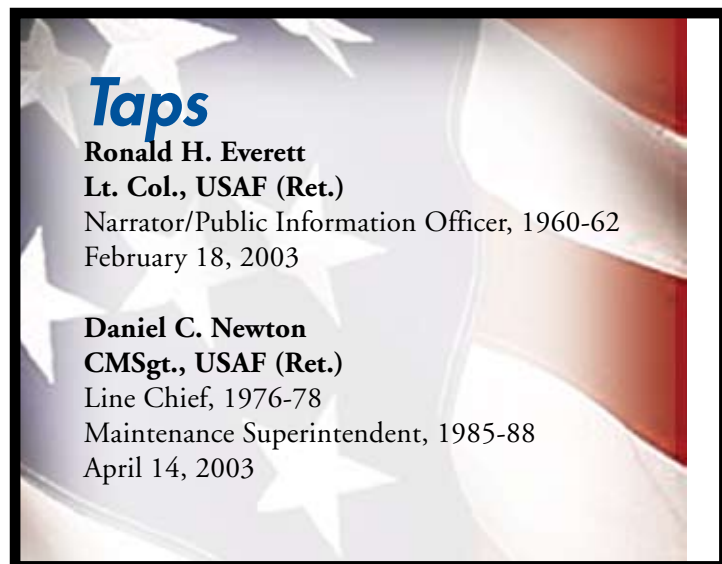
Both Tom and Dylan believe it is important for all alumni to understand how different eras got four, five or six jets into the air and how the show of today evolved through time. The men and women who lived it are the only people who can provide that information accurately.

The duo plan to create a story section where people can post stories and images about milestones, changes in aircraft or show content, memorable show stops and other interesting Thunderbird history tidbits.

“Dylan and I started the site to be a team effort,” Tom said. “But, the only way to reach our goal is with the help of our teammates. This is a project where everyone who has worn the patch over the past 50 years can contribute to his or her ongoing legacy. If we can get 10-20 volunteers – at least one or two from each era – we can give the alumni and active team what they need.

“Just e-mail us at admin@tbaa.org and give us an idea of what you can contribute. You don’t even need a computer to help; you can be gathering images and stories to send to us. If you have a computer, we can give you one section of the site to call your own to update daily, weekly, or whenever possible. It’s up to all of us to make this work!”

– Chuck Ramey



Postcards From the Past

I was just reading the old alumni newsletters, as I do from time to time. I have them back to when it was called *The Aerie*. Paul Kauttu was right; the F-105 did get a bum rap while in the Red White and Blue. The picture of the 105’s ejection seat brought memories of how many of those things I pulled out of the “pit” during my time at Bitburg. Each time I thought, *Man, that’s a long way down to the ground!*—But my heart is with the Phantom.

That big monster was so ugly she was beautiful. I still hear comments from people who saw the Team fly the Phantom and loved the show, especially when the wedge would taxi right up to the show line – maybe “lumber” would be a better choice of words – run them up, blow smoke, pop the canopies and shut down. The crowd would go crazy.

The recent article, “The Phantoms Rest” by Bob Gore, was great. I still feel what it was like to stand next to the intake when the pilots lit the cartridges. You had to suck in a big breath of fresh air and hope you could hold it ’til the smoke cleared ... not always successful, I might add.

Time moves on, as does Thunderbird history. The Phantom is part of it. She was big, loud and beautiful. They are sleeker and prettier today, and who knows, maybe in the not-to-distant future, F/A-22s or F-35s in RED, WHITE and BLUE. But for me **Phantoms Forever!**

– Walt Vickery (Egress/Asst. CC 69-71)

Thunder Rolls is published by the USAF Thunderbirds Alumni Association, Lloyd W. Newton (Nar/Slot/RW 75-78) General USAF (Ret), Chairman; Doe Wilson, Administrative Secretary. TBAA, 7661 Angel Crest Circle, Las Vegas, NV 89117; Phone (702) 871-7197; Fax (702) 871-9043; E-mail DoeWilson@aol.com; www.tbaa.org.

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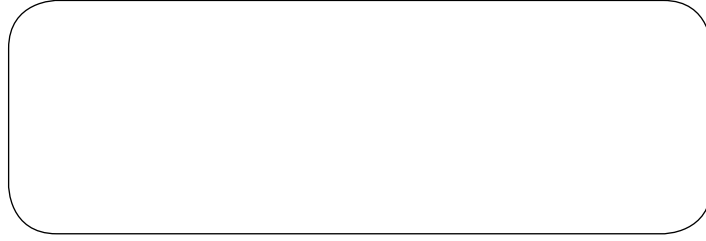
Graphic Design

Diana Mask, Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company
– Fort Worth

Printing

Sprint Press – Fort Worth

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THUNDERBOLLS

THE USAF THUNDERBIRDS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Once a
Thunderbird,
Always a
Thunderbird.

