



“Cleared Hot”

by Lon Holtz

Just think, in a little less than a year, we’ll be back at it again, this time in the beautiful Moody Gardens Hotel about 50 miles south of Houston in Galveston, Texas. More war stories, some new experiences, once again along the inviting Gulf Coast and a great hotel. The hotel seemingly has a wide variety of activities to fill your time when not otherwise occupied by A-37 tours.

The preliminary schedule of events promises some very attractive activities. I’m really looking forward to a visit to the NASA Space Center, which is a science museum and serves as the official visitor center of NASA Johnson Space Center. Not saying I ever want to go into space, but it’s something I’d like to see in person instead of on TV. In fact, I’m hoping that our members who did slip the surly bounds with a rocket strapped to the tails will join us and relate their experiences.

Fort Walton/Destin had some great restaurants, but they couldn’t cook a steak that I would eat twice. I like shrimp, crab, and lobster, too, but now we’re going to steak country. I’m going to get my fill of ribeyes, ribs, and prime rib before I leave there.

I know it’s way ahead of time, but I’d like to offer a few words of advice on travel. If you’re coming by air, I suggest you firm up your reservations early as the airlines seem to be having trouble with seat assignment, overbooking, and canceling services. I’d also consider renting a car as the hotel is about 50 miles south of Hobby International Airport and transportation to and from the hotel is on the expensive side. If you have a military ID, there are discounts available.

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It’s Galveston for the 2024 Reunion

The A-37 Association Board has approved Galveston, Texas, as the site for the 2024 reunion, anchoring down at the Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa and Convention Center. Planned dates are 7-11 April, just after spring break in that area of the country, but before the summer rush.

One of the attractions of the area is the number of things to do, see, and enjoy. Moody Gardens itself has several excellent facilities right on the grounds that will interest many of you. Go to www.moodygardens.com to view the full menu of sights on the premises.

At this point, tentative plans also include tours of the NASA Museum and Lone Star Flight Museum just south of Houston. In the meantime, we will be working on other activities that will provide an enjoyable experience for everybody.

So here’s what we need to know: how many of you plan to come to the 2024 reunion? We’ll be sending out a survey soon asking for your thoughts about our current reunion plans. **Please respond.**

The objective of these gatherings is to maintain that camaraderie from our unique experiences associated with the A-37, but our ability to support these events every two years depends heavily on your participation. And how many more of these will we be able to put together?

It’s important for the planners to know how many are interested in attending Galveston. The more people attending means lower cost per person, which in turn means we may be able to afford certain amenities. So look for that survey and let us know your intentions...Jerry Sailors

(By the way, we still have T-shirts for sale. See memorabilia page.)

**Growing old is hard work...
The mind says "yes" but, the body says "what the hell are you thinking"**

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“The A-37 Association is for those who flew, worked on/with, were saved by, or have high admiration for the great little fighter.”



...the smallest fighter... the fastest gun

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The Dragonfly is a publication of the A-37 Association published quarterly (except when within two months of a reunion, then monthly), as a service to the membership, new contacts, and other interested parties.

The views expressed herein are those of the editors/authors and do not necessarily reflect any official position of the A-37 Association. The editors reserve the right to print any article/letter/email/photo deemed to be of interest to members.

We also reserve the right to edit any article to fit space available and to reject any material considered inappropriate. We invite and encourage members/contacts to submit articles/letters/emails/photos.

(Reply from Jerry Sailors, 28 Jan 2023)

Yes, you do have all volumes (I-V) Ollie put out. They were printed over several years from about 2000 to 2010 as he collected the stories. We used those stories as the basis for our book, "Dragonfly: A-37s Over Vietnam," which we published in 2014 with a second printing in 2017. That book is now available for individual orders.

Curious as to where you found the five volumes. I know some had been on eBay.

(From Erik Goldstein, 29 Jan 2023)

I'd love to get a copy of "Dragonfly." How do I order? My 5 volumes came from eBay.

(Note: Books may be purchased by completing the order form found on www.a-37.org and submitting to dragonfly67.72@gmail.com.)

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(Following up on an email exchange from October 2022, on 1 Feb 2023, Charles Largay provided a link of his A-37 flying in the Oregon Air Show last fall)

Mark Peterson flying the air shows. Huggy Bird creates smoke rings with the smoke generators at certain times. Click on the A-37 below to view YouTube video.



Also click [here](#) to view Charles' friend, Huggy Huggins, conducting a walk-around for an interviewer at Reno Air Show.

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(From Hank Hoffman, 21 Mar 2023)

Last November I was privileged to speak before the USAF Academy Aero Dept instructors and selected students about my last flight at Aerospace Research Pilot School in 1973. *(To view Hank's discussion on flying the F-104 as a test pilot, click [here](#).)*

I was the last pilot to fly the F-104 on that Zoom mission, where you pick up Mach 2.0 and then trade all that energy for altitude - what a thrill of a ride! First you have to don a full pressure space suit and pre-breathe oxygen for half an hour, and then the fun begins.

In December of 1963 the F-104 set an unofficial world altitude record of 120,800 feet. Yes, I remember that's three times as fast as the A-37 would go and close to five times its altitude limit. I vividly remember exceeding Mach 0.7 in the A-37, being reminded that the reason for that limit was that you lose all vertical control with the stick because you blank out the tail. It happened during the A-10 test program while I was chasing one of those birds in a wind-up turn maneuver where he held an

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Member Update

Emails

(From Erik Goldstein, 27 Jan 2023)

I hope this finds you well! Recently, I was lucky enough to pick up five successive volumes of A-37 & 604th. stories, etc., put together by Ollie Maier (see attached image).

Can you let me know if I've got the whole set, and when they were first published?



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“Cleared Hot”

(Continued from p. 1)

I'd like to address a special invitation to our older members who can still travel to join us. Who knows how many more of these gatherings we can put together? We sure would like see your smiling kissers again before only a few of us are left.

I have a special comment here for George Courington. I am going to reserve a very special front row center table for you at the banquet so you don't have to say “I can't hear you” a hundred times. It might save me from throwing a beer bottle at you across a crowded room. And my aim is still pretty good.

In the meantime, be safe, take care out there, and the good Lord willing, I hope to see all your smiling faces in Galveston.

Emails (Continued from p. 2)

airspeed and increased g forces until stall. Since the A-10 is faster than the A-37 and can pull more gs, it was a chancy maneuver. When I lost control I was upside down and descending about 3,000 feet off the ground. That too was a very exciting ride.

(Note: Hank also included in this email an original poem he wrote called “Requiem For a Pilot.” See page 5.)

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(From Chris Stokes)

Dear A-37 enthusiasts and heroes,

Please enjoy this “one year” update on our Dragonfly (SN 71-826) project, which I purchased in February of 2022. We are over a year into the project now, and we have made much progress. When the plane first arrived, we had a large bunch of parts, all put together in the form of an A-37. At present, we have those same parts, but in strategic piles on the floor, at the paint shop, on tables, shelves, etc. – And only a true A-37 connoisseur would be able to recognize the skeleton of the airplane which remains sitting on jacks and a welded frame in our hangar in Lincoln. Never being a maintenance officer, an A&P (*Airframe & Powerplant*), or really anything other than filling out the 781s at the maintenance debrief, it has been quite a learning curve for me. *(See Chris's update on this page.)*



71-826 at National Warplane Museum in Elmira, NY



War Story

An Update on Dragonfly SN 71-826

by Chris Stokes

SN 71-826 is labeled “EXPERIMENTAL,” so it is really up to myself, my mechanic, and our FAA representative called a “DAR” (designated airworthiness representative) to ultimately bring our plane and the associated paperwork to the FAA for final approval. I have heard this at least ten times since I started this restoration: “It's NOT the airplane that is approved; it is the paperwork.” The Feds spend 95% of their time poring through the paperwork, and hardly any time actually climbing around the airplane or testing anything which seems backwards. That being said, I have learned quite a bit of leeway can be accepted in an experimental category aircraft. I have routinely faced decisions regarding replacing or overhauling parts, or just inspecting the original parts and “calling it good.”

This has led me to have some really challenging decisions as to how to approach the work trying to keep costs down, but keeping safety to an acceptable level. For example, should we overhaul the fuel control units for \$20,000 or do we “call it good”? Hopefully, you see the stress in these decisions, and we are extremely careful and conservative in this decision making. I always said I want to die in my sleep like my grandfather, not like the three other people in the plane screaming and yelling.

I had always wanted to be an owner of a jet warbird since I hung up my G-Suit in the USAF. Buying my PT-17 Stearman in 2020 really re-lit my general aviation bug. By taking an online ground refresher course and an FAA check ride, I regained my CFII (*Certified Flight Instructor-Instrument*) rating which had been dormant since I went to ENJJPT (*Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training*) in 1993.

Meanwhile, a friend, the current Wing Commander at the Lincoln Air Guard, and I are in a flying club which owns a 1976 Beech Bonanza A-36. We were playing around with the idea of buying a T-34, which is basically a tandem Bonanza with a stick vs. yoke. Sadly, these aircraft are quite a commodity and extremely expensive.

We kept an eye out in Trade-A-Plane and Controller classified ads, and this A-37 project popped up in New York for sale. I ran it by pilot and mechanic friends who agreed it would be a fun airplane to own, actually affordable, and relatively safe being American made with two very reliable J85 engines and side-by-side vs. tandem seating. After going out to upstate NY to see it, I sent an A&P to do a rough “pre-buy.” He said it was in great condition, so I bought it and had it shipped by truck to my hangar in Lincoln, NE. *(See article in the Oct 2022 “The Dragonfly.”)*

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War Story (Continued from p. 3)

Maintenance team: My maintenance team consists of Maintenance Director Bill Stukenholtz, a US Army vet who is a semi-retired pilot and A&P/IA (*Airframe & Powerplant/Inspection Authorization*) in Nebraska. Bill is on salary and is the “quarterback” for the project. Also on the team in an hourly capacity is Sean Case, who is an active A&P/IA for the Nebraska State Patrol, keeping their helicopters and fixed wings flying. A recently retired USAF fuel cell specialist, Dave Shiner, has been a huge help with his 24 years of experience climbing around and fixing fuel cells.

Later we found out 71-826 had different serial-numbered wings and engines. The fuselage and cockpit were relatively new (crated since 1973), but the wings and engines were not original and were traded out somewhere along the line, probably in Australia before it was shipped to Canada in the mid-1980s. One of the wings had some light corrosion, as well as the five thick black self-sealing rubber bladders were completely shot.

An update on our progress and the projects we are focusing on this summer:

Fuel system: As you may remember, in addition to the 96-gallon tip-tanks, which we are putting back together with new seals and gaskets, each wing has five bladders inter-connected with plumbing, two in the leading edges and three in the wing between the spars and the



71-826 is being restored in Lincoln, NE

spanners. We pulled all ten of the old heavy black rubber wing bladders plus a fuselage bladder and sent them off to a company in Oregon to be used as templates for new ones. Our work now is to rebuild the fuel systems, pretty much from the ground up. We are waiting for our new bladders to be manufactured in Oregon, expecting this to cost around \$25,000, then we have to reconnect all the bladders, plumbing, pumps, valves, etc.

Engines: We also need two new engines. Surprisingly we found some mid-time engines with log books (including the fuel control units) for \$35,000 each. I am working on buying those out of a place in Georgia. They will not have the exact dash number, since they are assumably from an old junked Lear 20-Series airplane or Falcon. Therefore, we will have to take off the parts from the junked original engines and modify the good engines to fit in the A-37.

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Painting: We have been painting pieces and parts over the last many months, which you may have seen on my Facebook page. About 40% of it's finished (wings, stabilizer, flight controls; and next week we are going to trailer the fuselage over to the paint shop (which is a custom car builder) to finish the job. Of course we will have some detail to work out scouring old pictures to figure out where to stencil the many “Pull Here,” “ESCAPE,” etc., the stars and bars, and other markings will go.

I am planning on the “EK” tail flash. If anyone has any old photos from Vietnam or Barksdale/Alex of A-37s sitting in a box in your basement, please consider sending them to me for safe keeping for the next generation and to help me with making this airplane perfect from a paint perspective. If anyone is willing to make a sizable donation to the cause, I will provide them with not only a flight, but put your name in the blue box on the lower left side of the nose where the pilots' names were stenciled!

Flight controls/cables: We just received our new flight control cables (\$3,200) back from a manufacturer in Wichita, which we had taken from the wings and fuselage and sent down to be used as templates for the new cables. As you would guess, the flight controls are a pretty complex series of cables and pulleys, and we will be piecing those back together in the coming months.

Landing gear: We have taken off the main and the nose landing gear, and are overhauling them. This includes new seals and O-rings, a cleanup, fresh paint, bearings, and brake pads (which we are having a problem sourcing). We have six new unused tires, but they are so old we probably won't be able to use them. I guess a model King Air uses the same tires and they are like \$400 each (which I don't think is too bad). Also, we have to put this all back together and then get the gear to sequence properly, which I have heard is quite a task.

Starter generators, fuel pumps, valves, air cycle machine, etc.: We have many “accessories” or “rotables” which need to be overhauled and cleared operational. Many of these are expensive to have a specialty shop fix and update, but crucial to getting the plane back to an airworthy condition. We are plugging away at these important items.

Our immediate goal is to have the airplane “towable” to the Lincoln Guardians Air Show in late August of 2023. Please consider coming to Lincoln and spending a day checking out the A-37's progress and the Blue Angels at the air show...You will be my guest! Otherwise, our goal is to have this airplane flying by this coming spring of 2024.

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Requiem for a Pilot

He flew.

In his youth he tried to match the grace of the sparrow,
darting and flashing, breathlessly and skillfully using the air
as a canvas to show his joy at performing with such precision.
Striving for perfection, he flew.

Later he flew

as the hawk, soaring and riding the wind,
effortlessly scaling the thermals, climbing at will
to heights that could only be passion;
there, the naked world lay exposed to his marveling eyes.
And as the hawk he struck from the sky,
casting fire in his righteous anger.
Daring his very life, he flew.

He flew

as no creature has flown since the beginning of time.
He flew with such power that the gentle winds tore apart
before the fury of his transit.
The pressure of his full-grown wings squeezed moisture
from the humid air and left its own white finger of cloud to mark his path.
The air itself shattered before him and screamed in pain.
The sound of his passage was more than thunder,
and it caused the earth and us upon it to tremble.
The thrill of his flight filled his very soul with life.
Supremely, he flew.

And after he passed,

the birds and the jealous planet below paused a long moment in silence,
left with only an echo and a memory before resuming their leaden existence.
He flew as none before; he flew as none to follow.
He will fly no more.

Yet still he flies!

Look there in the heavens! Just out of sight
in the clouds right before you, he dwells now
in the glorious prismatic sunrises and rainbows,
in the mysterious beauty of the northern lights
and the breathless green flash at sunset,
making his home in the sky he loved so well.
Mourn not: the aviator is home!
He flies now with God.

Hank Hoffman, 2001

(To hear Hank recite this poem, click [here](#).)

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