



**“Cleared Hot”**

by Lon Holtz

I’ve sat in front of this keyboard for the last hour trying to think of something to write about that hasn’t been offered before. Most of the great stories are already in our book or offered on our website. Stories filled with success and bravado, either in our fighter life in combat, or follow-on assignments wearing the sword. Others heading for training new shavetails to fill the requirements of history yet to come. Or our maintenance guys moving on to aircraft so large you wonder how they ever got airborne with all the cargo stuffed into them. Others retired and went on to be very successful in business. We also had four members reach and excel in their efforts as general officers. And finally, we have two Dragons that slipped the surly bounds of earth and became a large part of our history, as they took the name “Dragonfly” with them.

They did things this pilot would never consider doing. Like sitting atop this huge rocket pointed at the stars, waiting for someone far removed from that rocket to press a button to launch you towards them. And later jettison those launch rockets, and the crew now understanding that they are all alone. Or just float around the cockpit operating far-reaching systems, gathering data for future use. And when their mission requirements were fulfilled, head for home and face the challenges of getting back into the earth’s orbit to land the aircraft. First aiming at the exact point to penetrate earth’s heat barrier, while the whole outside of their vehicle was burning up. Once clear of that ordeal and the aircraft cooled, it was time to slow down, configure the aircraft, and let a computer land the bird. There is no missed approach here; you must land from that one approach.

(Continued on p. 3)

**The schedule of events for our April 2024 reunion**

is rounding into shape. Besides the obvious attraction of talking trash with old buddies and burnishing the lies we’ve told in the past, we are scheduling one day for visits to NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston and the Lone Star Flight Museum at old Ellington Field.

Our thanks go to John Blaha for setting up the NASA tour. John, one of our own A-37 jocks from Vietnam, was chosen as an astronaut in 1980, subsequently flying on five space missions between the Shuttle and Mir programs. He was the spacecraft commander on two of the Shuttle missions. He has also agreed to follow up the Johnson Space Center visit with a presentation at our closing banquet to provide further insights into the nation’s space program. This will be a great opportunity to see firsthand what’s going on in an area so vital to our national security.

Registration and hotel reservation instructions will be sent out later this year, but plan on arriving on Sunday, 7 April, and checking out on 11 April.

In conjunction with the Military Reunion Network (MRN), we sent out a survey on 18 July seeking feedback on our plan for Galveston. To date, we’ve received 57 responses. That’s a great number, and I appreciate those

who responded because you are helping us to make our gatherings better. See page 3 for more general survey observations.

For updates on Galveston 2024, check our Association website at [www.a-37.org](http://www.a-37.org).

...Jerry Sailors



“How do you say, ‘take your job and shove it’ with poinsettias?”

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

Inside:	Page
Member Update/Emails/FB	2,5
War Stories/Articles	3-4
Memorabilia Page	6



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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.*

## **Member Update**

### **Gone West**

**Robert Custer**, 7 May 2023, Redlands, CA. [Obituary](#)

### **Emails** (Also see p. 5)

John “Lambo” Lamb, sent a video that all of us can agree with. If you take pride in our flag, take a look at [Old Glory - YouTube](#) and remember the following:

#### **When to salute the US flag:**

During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag or when the flag is passing in a parade or in review:

- All persons in uniform should salute.
- **Members of the Armed Forces and veterans not in uniform may render the military salute.**

## **...the smallest fighter... the fastest gun**

- All other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, or if applicable, remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart.
- All such conduct toward the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes.

During play of the National Anthem (When the flag is displayed):

- Individuals in uniform should salute at the first note of the anthem and maintain that position until the last note.
- **Members of the Armed Forces not in uniform and veterans may render the military salute in the manner provided for individuals in uniform.**
- All other persons should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart.
- Men not in uniform, if applicable, should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart.
- When the flag is not displayed, all present should face toward the music and act in the same manner they would if the flag were displayed.

## **Facebook**

One of the sources of information about the A-37 is the A-37 Association Facebook page, honchoed by Hank Hoffman. Of particular interest is the participation on the site of our Latin American compadres.

In scrolling through posts covering at least back to 2015, you can find several articles and videos that provide a different view of our favorite aircraft, especially to those of us who are now trying to remember what we did over 50 years ago. True, some of the posts show activities in the 1980s and 90s, but still stoke pride that the bird is still flying operational missions even today.

### **“Stick It in the Basket”**

One of the more interesting posts is a two-minute video contributed by Eduardo Fadul of two Dragonflies refueling from a KC-135. Takes a pilot with a steady hand to make it look so simple. Click [here](#) to view the footage.

### **“A 10-Ship Flyby”**

Yasel Garcia posted [this video](#) of a Chilean Air Force flyby of ten A-37Bs in a tight formation, reminiscent of the 16-ship flybys in October 1970 when the 8th AS and 90th AS closed up shop at Bien Hoa.

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

### “Cleared Hot”

(Continued from p. 1)

With all this said and done, do you think I “WOULD EVER” volunteer or climb into a vehicle for such a duty?

**“NOT IN THIS OR ANY OTHER LIFETIME!!”**

But we had two great heroes (John Blaha and Dick Covey) that did just that and brought back valuable data that served us in future space exploration missions. And I am looking forward to listening to them and touring the special visit to the NASA Space Center at our upcoming reunion.

Hope to see you in Galveston, as I think it’s going to be one of our very best reunions.



### War Story

“What the hell was that?”

by Dave Prizner

*(In a Facebook exchange with the son of Ulysses “Sam” Taylor, Dave Prizner related his “scariest” moment in Nam.)*

One of the scariest missions that I had during my year was with your Dad. Sam was lead and I was #2. We were over Cambodia orbiting at about 15,000 feet waiting for the FAC to get his act together. Suddenly I saw “shadows” go by my aircraft. “What the hell was that?!” Then the ground below us erupted: we were under a B-52 strike!!

No “heavy artillery” warning was transmitted as usual with B-52 strikes. Nothing! We dropped our ordnance with a highly shaken FAC and RTB’d to Bien Hoa. Sam was pissed! Except for the grace of God, we would have been killed by our own. He filed an Operational Hazard Report with 7th AF in Saigon, but nothing ever came of it. Classic example of the left hand unaware of the right hand. And people wonder why we lost the war!

### War Story 2

“Wait for Me!!”

by Dave Prizner

I remember a mission flying with Lt Col Henney, 8th SOS Ops Officer, as lead and yours truly as two. Col Henney had previously flown the B-58 Hustler; consequently, he used only one throttle position: full forward. Challenge to fly as his wingman and keep up. He was pretty much unconventional in just about everything.

This particular mission was to strike a suspected storage area, in reality a rather large chateau near the Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia. Because of the distance from Bien Hoa, we were limited to two passes. We both dropped and both missed—embarrassing!! On the second pass, Col Henney missed the house and hit the garden behind

the house. The garden blew up!! I dropped on the garden and then concentrated on catching up to lead. I finally caught up on initial at Bien Hoa!

Col Henney was a hell of a good guy and one of a few senior officers that had earned everyone’s respect! Also confirmed the principle that it is better to be lucky than good!

### The MRN Survey

In planning for our April 2024 reunion, we sought advice from the Military Reunion Network (MRN) on how to make A-37 Association reunions better. One of the things we wanted to know is **how much interest there is in attending the one in Galveston**. So MRN volunteered to draft and disseminate a survey of our membership through our email list. That survey went out on 18 July. So far, we have received 57 responses, about 20% of the email list.

In general, **responses were encouraging** as the majority said that the Association planners have done a good job in the past (which makes us feel good), but had a few suggestions from a personal standpoint, such as wanting to see the list of people attending. Easily done.

Our target attendance is 25-30 members. The survey indicated 20 people were definitely or will probably attend with another 16 interested but undecided. So what would draw those undecided?

We’re trying to make the visit to Galveston an enjoyable experience. The Moody Gardens Hotel itself is a draw with fantastic amenities on the grounds. **A particular attraction for our group is a chance to tour NASA’s Johnson Space Center** arranged by John Blaha, who spent over 160 days in space in both the Shuttle and Mir programs. Further, Galveston itself is filled with shops and restaurants that should appeal to all tastes.

Recall at Fort Walton Beach last year, our friends Bloke Maurer and Rod Horn offered attendees free rides in their acrobatic aircraft, a popular experience. They’ll be **offering**

**those rides again** as they are based in nearby Ellington Airport, old Ellington AFB.

In addition, Galveston is another chance to catch up with those we haven’t seen in two years and, in some cases, decades. Given the ages of our planners, **we don’t know how many more of these events we can do**. So let’s make this a good one.... Jerry Sailors



“I know you’re in bed with the flu, but I need the keys to the filing cabinet.”



### War Story 3

Welcome to Combat Dragon  
by Eric Jackson

In late 1966, I was a staff sergeant assigned to Nellis AFB. One night, William “Bill” Eberhardt awakened me and said, “Let’s go to Vietnam.” I started to get up. He said, “No, we have to wait until morning.” He added, “But there is a top-secret mission going to Vietnam.”

This was okay by me. I thought Vegas was too dangerous anyway. For example, two guys would check the rocket launchers for stray voltage; and then a half hour or so later, Bill and I would load the rockets on the aircraft.

When morning came Bill and I went to see about this “top-secret” mission. We entered an office and were met by Maj. Joe Byrnes. He didn’t seem too thrilled about us being there.

In fact, I was ready to leave. Then, in our conversation with him, the fact that we were weapons mechanics (bomb loaders) came up. What a change in his personality! Out came the coffee and photos showing what all the little Tweety Bird could carry.

He explained his initial apparent lack of enthusiasm by saying he had thought we were in another career field in which he had more applicants than he could use.

A few days later, I was told to report to Combat Dragon Task Force Commander, Col. Heath “Bo” Bottomly, and Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Louis Weber. My duty section was not happy with this arrangement, so I was ordered back to my section. I don’t remember how many times I was bounced back and forth.

Finally, I was told by Major Byrnes to get three other weapons guys and go to the Cessna Aircraft Corporation in Kansas. There we were to beg, borrow or requisition all the information we could on the A-37.

Our first visit to Cessna was for a week. The second time I think was about three weeks and probably the straw that broke the camel’s back as far as my former duty section was concerned. I was permanently assigned to Combat Dragon and given the title of “Dragon 9.”

So as you can see, opposition to Combat Dragon began in the days even before we got to Vietnam.



S. Sgt. Eric R. Jackson (on right) and crew visiting the Cessna factory in Wichita to gather material on the A-37. With him, from left, is A2C Albert C. Rafferty, A1C Richard L. Mustered and A1C William R. Eberhardt. *Eric Jackson collection*

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### War Story 4

First Landing at England  
by Fred Long

On February 14, 1967, I received orders to report to England AFB for special training on the aircraft’s weapons system, which, at the time, I knew nothing about. All I knew was I would eventually end up in Vietnam for Project Combat Dragon.

I arrived at England AFB near the end of April, a weapons mechanic, with 10 months actual military service.

It was during our second week, and we were setting up our shop, when the first plane, number 503, landed on the base. We all went out on the flight line to see it come in and kiss the ground.

It was a pretty sight, that first plane landing. Surprisingly, after a check of the weapons system, we found it wouldn’t work. The first reaction from the supervisor was a bad relay switch. This required pulling the seat and getting down on the floor of the plane, systematically removing the wiring from one switch to another. Pat Stratton and I did the job, and it took several hours to get the plane back together.

We went through the weapons check again, and again it failed. I went into my toolbox, took hold of a screwdriver and started removing the front panel of the nearest pylon. About eight screws held the thing in place; four down each side of a concave shaped metal covering. I pulled the panel off and a cannon plug fell out, dangling like a snake in front of me. The pylon had never been connected to the power system.

I plugged it in and asked Pat to climb into the driver’s seat and run another systems check. It worked. My supervisor was standing nearby, watching everything. I turned to him saying, in as pleasant a tone as I could muster, “Next time let’s check to see if everything is plugged in before we start changing relay switches.” He said nothing and walked back to the shop. Pat and I pulled the covers on the rest of the pylons and plugged them in, and the bird was ready to go.



A large crowd gathered on the flight line to see the first A-37 delivered for the Combat Dragon test program. *Louis Weber collection*

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### Email 2

In addition to his email cited on page 2, John Lamb also submitted the note below outlining an effort at the USAF Academy to honor Michael Blassie.

Fellow A-37 Association members:

There is a movement underway to honor Lt Mike Blassie who was shot down near An Loc in May of 1972. We all know his remains were in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for fourteen years until finally released to his family.

In addition to remembering Michael Blassie, the Men's Soccer Team at the USAFA and their alumni want to create a program to motivate the players and remind the "leadership" at the Academy of the mission of the United States Air Force as we knew it and still do. "Fly, Fight, Win."

The program will be to present the Michael Blassie "Warrior" Award on a yearly basis. It will be a beautiful glass trophy presented to the men's soccer team member, chosen by **secret ballot**, who has displayed courage, determination and leadership potential within the soccer team and also in his role as an Academy Cadet.

One of our former 604th squadron members (Tom O'Beirne), is at the heart of this program effort and would especially appreciate the A-37 Association's support.

Could I suggest that we send this article out to all our membership in the next newsletter for feedback and input that we could discuss at the next Board meeting?

This award has been approved by the USAFA Department of Athletics with the blessings of the Blassie family...JHL

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Most of you probably know the Michael Blassie story, but for those who may need a refresher, below is an article previously published in this newsletter in July 2020.

### "No One Left Behind, No One Forgotten"

Strong words military veterans recognize immediately.

These words are also the motto of the Jefferson Barracks POW-MIA Museum in St. Louis, Missouri, derived from the Museum's mission statement: "to reverently honor all who served our country in any branch of the United States military who were captured by enemies of the United States or who are missing in action from any year and from any conflict."

Located in the Jefferson Barracks Historic District, the Museum is housed in the Old 1898 Officers Quarters on Hancock Road, but is currently closed undergoing restoration to facilitate "the gathering and preserving of POW and MIA artifacts, information and history."

All Americans should be aware of the plight of our POW's and MIA's, but we in the A-37 Association should be particularly attuned as one of the highlights of the facility upon reopening will be a dedication of the main exhibit room as the "Lt Michael Blassie Memorial Room." Featured will be the story of Mike and his family's quest to "bring their son home," an A-37 model, and a bust of Mike.

For those who may not know Mike's story, he was shot down on 11 May 1972 near An Loc, Vietnam, while flying with the 8th Special Operations Squadron out of Bien Hoa. His remains were recovered in late 1972 and in 1984 were interred in the Vietnam Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington. There they lay for 14 years until his family persuaded the US Department of Defense to use DNA testing to confirm his identity. In 1998, he was brought home to Missouri.

A dedicated group of Museum volunteers had worked hard to reopen the facility in June of this year, but, as everywhere else in the county, those plans were waylaid by COVID-19. Even yet, a tentative plan to open this September has now been delayed until 11 May 2021, the 49th anniversary of Mike's shootdown.

According to Russ McKnight, a 1970 classmate of Mike's at the USAF Academy and point person for the class's role in the dedication, work has resumed to get the building ready for the reopening. The Class of 1970 is ginning up support for the project as well as attendance at the dedication. Plans also include an address by Mike's sister Patricia.

Missouri lays claim to being the first "POW-MIA State," and St. Louis County is justifiably proud of its efforts to keep the motto of "Never Forget" front and center.

Bronze plaque to commemorate "The Lt Michael Blassie Room" at the JB POW-MIA Museum



# A-37 Association Memorabilia Items



(New)  
FWB T-shirt  
\$21 (includes shipping)  
(S, M, L, XL, XXL)



Dragon T-shirt  
\$21 (includes shipping)  
(XL)



Koozie  
\$2 (includes shipping)



License Plate Frame \$10 ea  
plus \$6 shipping



50th Anniversary Patch \$6  
(includes shipping)



A-37 Lapel Pin 1" sq \$8  
(includes shipping)



2.25-inch SEA Decal \$5  
(includes shipping)

Go to [www.a-37.org](http://www.a-37.org) for order form.