



“Cleared Hot”

by Lon Holtz

GALVESTON—ONLY SIX MONTHS AWAY! As I think about our upcoming reunion, it is with genuine gratitude to our guest speaker, John Blaha, for his support in helping to make our 2024 reunion an outstanding event. He not only is one of our own, but also a former NASA astronaut.

John is special to us in many ways. First of all, after graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy (1965) and receiving his pilot wings at Williams AFB (1967), he joined the 604th ACS flying A-37s in Vietnam in 1968, flying 361 combat missions, eleven more than me. From there his bona fides, and a list of special honors, grew at an astounding rate.

I offer a few of a very lengthy list: Master of Science in Astronautical Engineering at Purdue University (1966); test pilot and instructor at Edwards AFB; and working with the Royal Air Force in England in their Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment on issues facing their fighter force. Later, he worked at the Pentagon in the Studies and Analyses department with his results on the F-15 and F-16 presented to the Department of Defense, State Department, and Congressional staffs. Then in 1980, he joined that elite class of aviators that took us into space—NASA.

John flew five space missions, two as the pilot and two more as the Spacecraft Commander. The fifth was in Russian Spacecraft (Mir 22), spending four months sharing his knowledge and testing results. In all, he spent 161 days in space. An author of numerous technical articles on spacecraft performance and control, he was inducted in 2008 into the highly competitive Astronaut Hall of Fame.

As an aviator, John logged over 7,000 flying hours in 34 different aircraft. Even with this diverse experience, when asked in an interview about his occupation, without hesitation he answered “Fighter Pilot.” So, like many of us, he has that feeling that never seems to go away.

Let’s make Galveston one of our best!

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**Galveston, oh Galveston
I still hear your sea waves crashing
While I watch the cannons flashing
I clean my gun
And dream of Galveston**

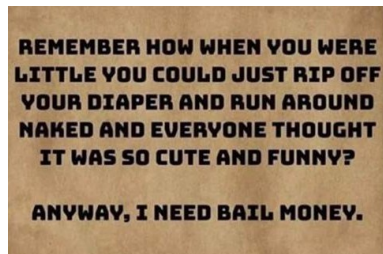
Remember this Jimmy Webb song recorded in 1968 by Glen Campbell? According to Wikipedia, at the time many considered it a Vietnam protest song, but Webb said the song is "about a guy who's caught up in something he doesn't understand and would rather be somewhere else." Does that sound familiar?

Well, we can now do more than dream about Galveston. We can gather there and sing “Kum Ba Yah” 7-11 April 2024 for our next A-37 Association reunion. We feel good about the place and events planned. A special treat will be a tour of Space Center Houston arranged by John Blaha, a former astronaut as well as an A-37 driver. (See Lon Holtz’s column for more about John.)

An article on page 3 presents a broad overview of our Galveston reunion. We would certainly like to gather as many of our A-37 community as possible, including family members, as we anticipate a great time in April.

On page 4 are two articles describing the continuing effort to memorialize our fallen comrade who once lay in the Tomb of the Vietnam Unknown, but is now interred where he should be. Both encapsulate Mike Blassie’s love of sports and his legacy in his hometown.

On page 5, read about Oshkosh 2024 when Mark Peterson has plans for both his and Charley’s aircraft to participate in the EAA event, “Warbirds of America.”



Check out our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page for updates on Galveston and other news, and remember, we still have some memorabilia items for sale (See p. 6.)
...Jerry Sailors

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



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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

Pete Schindler, 1 October 2023, Las Vegas, NV [Obituary](#)

Emails

(To Charles Largay and Mark Peterson, 2 Aug 23)

We're putting together plans for an April 2024 reunion of the A-37 Association in Galveston, TX. Any chance you could fly your bird in for a display? I have a point guy on the ground there who could make arrangements for you if you wish.

(From Mark Peterson, 21 Sep 23)

I would very much like to bring the A-37 to Galveston for the reunion in 2024, but we just took Charlie's aircraft to Wisconsin for an event and the costs and overhead were even bigger than I expected. We spent almost \$17,000 in Jet fuel

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to fly the 1172 nm from Boise to Madison and back.

Boise to Galveston is 1336 nm and would take three legs at about 500 gallons per leg and getting home would be four at 450 gallons each. With Jet fuel now costing about \$6.00/gallon, the round trip fuel bill would be at least \$20,000.

Between the fuel costs and possible weather issues, I don't think it would be possible to get the jet from Boise to Galveston in April. I am very sorry we can't make this happen.

On a good note, we are planning to take both aircraft to Oshkosh 2024 (22-28 July) for the Warbirds in Review program and would like to coordinate with you to see how many A-37 vets we can get to attend and participate in a panel session with the A-37. Mark *(See article on Oshkosh 2024, p. 5.)*

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(From Tom O'Beirne, 28 Aug 23)

We would like to announce that "The Mike Blassie Warrior Award" was approved by the Air Force Academy as an annual award for the Men's Soccer Team. We think it is very appropriate to inform the A-37 community of this. We can all be proud Mike is being honored in this way. *(See article on p. 4.)*

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(From Paul Dillon, 5 Oct 23) A special and unique tribute to Mike Blassie. *(See article on p. 4.)*

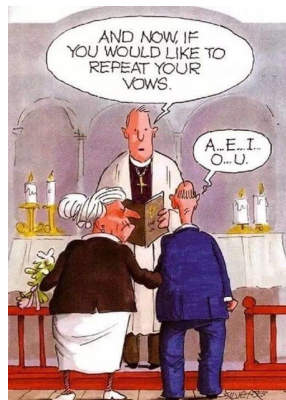
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(From John Lamb, 11 Oct 23)

A couple of weeks ago, Gary White and his lovely wife Rhonda stopped by to see us. He was the primary Crew Chief for 350, the jet that had my name on it. Splendid people. Here's a picture he took for us while they were traveling in Colorado:



Life is good, we are blessed. Monday was 40th anniversary for Carol and me. Best wishes my brothers!



"He's not the man I married forty-five years ago."

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Let's talk about the 2024 reunion.

We want our April 2024 reunion to be a very special one. Why? Because we're getting on up in years, at least those of us who are putting these things together. So who knows how many more, if any, we want to do. Or perhaps more accurately, able to do.

There are options: make this the final one, try to hold on for one more on our own, or maybe join with other Vietnam era reunion groups to lessen the logistics and combine planning resources. Your feedback would be very helpful. Based on our recent survey, there is still interest, but an undertone was the recognition that demands of travel and health are taking their toll.

In light of those comments, we want to make this gathering as special as possible.

Our base of operations. A 4-star hotel, Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa, and Convention Center is nestled on the beautiful Galveston Island in Texas with lots of amenities and attractions right on the premises: Aquarium Pyramid, Rainforest Pyramid,

Discovery Museum, 3D & 4D Theaters, and a paddlewheel boat. Enjoy swimming? The hotel has both indoor and outdoor pools with a swim-up bar. Parasailing or ziplining?

Take a shot. Golf? Kayaking? Have a go. Bottom line is there's a lot to do just on the hotel grounds and in the local area.

The City of Galveston offers a variety of activities and attractions, not the least of which is the city itself full of things to do for all ages. Restaurants and shopping are numerous with locations in the downtown and along the beach and harbor front. A trolley connects Moody Gardens with downtown and the beachfront during the day on a regular basis.

Side note: famous people from Galveston among others include Barry White (singer/songwriter), Jack Johnson (first black heavyweight champion), Kay Bailey Hutchinson (US Senator), Bill Engvall (comedian), Sheldon Cooper (fictional character on "The Big Bang Theory"), and you will certainly remember Sig Jackucki, who pitched the St. Louis Browns to their only pennant in 1944!



(www.moodygardens.com)



Stewart Beach
(www.visitgalveston.com)



The Schedule of Events include air rides around the Galveston area with **Blake Maurer and Rod Horn** in their acrobatic aircraft.



(A-37 Assn Photo)

These flights were popular at Fort Walton Beach. Blake says we won't have nearly as many restrictions on airspace encountered at the Destin Executive Airport. The logistics of getting to and from the aircraft will be more convenient in that Scholes Field, the site of an old Army Air Corps base, is just next door.

An additional feature is a planned **outing for the ladies**, which will include an opportunity to shop, lunch, and generally enjoy the local Galveston area. This will be a great opportunity for family members and friends to experience the camaraderie of our group as well as the probably once-in-a-lifetime activities on the schedule.



(www.visitgalveston.com)

One of our tours will be the **Lone Star Flight Museum** (www.lonestarflight.org) located at Ellington Field. At the time we will be there, the Lone Star will feature a Vietnam Special Exhibit, which should bring out memories from duty in the war.

The **NASA tour** will be a chance to see the nation's space program firsthand. The tour, facilitated by John Blaha, will be a special event, one that you will count as a



John Blaha
(NASA Photo)

highlight of the reunion. John will also be the speaker at the closing banquet on Wednesday. A couple of distinctions of note: as both an A-37 pilot and an astronaut, he's one of only two in the world. (The other being Dick Covey.) In addition, he's had a planet named after him: Planet Blaha. (How many people can say that?) John will relate his experiences as an aviator and space expert and provide some insight into the future of the nation's space program.

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War Story 2

Hawk Zero Two

by Paul Dillon

(President, Jefferson Barrack POW-MIA Museum, St. Louis, MO)

In 2021 we put together the mini-documentary about A-37 pilot Lt. Mike Blassie, shot down near An Loc on May 11, 1972, and who for 14 years represented all of our Missing and Unaccounted For from Vietnam in the Vietnam War Tomb of the Unknown in Arlington.

Mike's radio call sign was "Hawk Zero Two," and in 2020 the Hillsboro, Missouri R-3 School District, the "Hillsboro Hawks," adopted Mike as one of their own, and ever since then as a part of National POW-MIA Recognition Day/Week, the "Hillsboro Hawks" have held a POW-MIA Remembrance Event as part of their football pre-game ceremony in Honor of Mike and all of our MIAs, our former POWs, and their Families.

This year besides their traditional POW-MIA black "Hawk Zero Two" uniforms with "Hawk Zero Two" on the back of their jerseys and helmets, they also had Mike's A-37 squadron patch, the 8th Special Operations Squadron, on their helmets along with the POW-MIA emblem. It was truly special.

I thought you guys and all of the Members of the A-37 Association would appreciate what these Hillsboro students, their faculty, staff, coaches, and the Hillsboro Mayor are doing to Remember and Honor Mike... his A-37 squadron mates... and indeed all of our Veterans, former POWs, our MIAs, and their Families.

We are very proud of these kids! Hope you all are too... they are not forgetting you and what you all did for our freedoms.

Also, that A-37, 8th Special Operations Squadron patch logo looks mighty good on those helmets!

Take care. Avoid that triple A...Paul



War Story

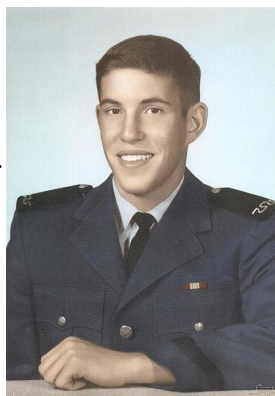
USAF Academy Establishes

"The Mike Blassie Warrior Award"

by Tom O'Beirne

(This is a follow-up to an article in the July 2023 newsletter.)

The United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, has established an annual award in honor of 1Lt Mike Blassie (Class of 1970), who was shot down and killed in Vietnam in May 1972 while flying an A-37 on a close-air-support mission. Lt Blassie was originally interred in The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery. When his identity was discovered, he was exhumed and reinterred near his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. As a cadet Mike was an outstanding player on the Men's Soccer Team and epitomized the Warrior Spirit embodied in the mission of the US Air Force Academy and the United States Air Force.



Mike Blassie-a doolie in 1966.
Photo: Tom O'Beirne Collection

Dick Coe (MiG Killer!) and I (both of Class of '68) headed up the effort to establish the award. We're very proud of that. We played soccer with Mike at the Academy. To the best of my knowledge, he was one of the first to be "recruited" to play soccer at the Academy. He was an outstanding player and athlete!

Mike was in my squadron (8th SOS) at Bien Hoa when he was shot down, although I had rotated back months earlier. The Blassie family saga was a human-interest story, followed, not just by fighter pilots and soccer players, but by millions around the country. It is very important to the AF that his Warrior Spirit stays alive at the Academy as an example to the cadets.

Mike's family is excited that the award was established in his name and sees this as a very positive undertaking. We can all understand this, especially considering all they have been through.

The award itself is an annual individual award presented to a men's soccer player who distinguishes himself as a constant force for winning. The selectee is chosen by just the players or his teammates. The award itself has been funded in perpetuity and will be given anonymously through the Men's Soccer Alumni Association. Donations are certainly welcome through the Falcon Athletic Fund. Click [here](#) to donate.

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War Story 3

Oshkosh 2024

Mark Peterson, who is currently rehabbing his own A-37, also flies a bird owned by Charles Largay in airshows, primarily in the northwest part of the country. He plans for both his and Charles' aircraft to participate in the "Warbirds of America" event at Oshkosh 2024 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, next July.

"Warbirds of America" is a unique part of an annual fly-in of recreational aviation enthusiasts sponsored by the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA). According to its website, EAA's mission is to grow participation in aviation to include antiques, classics, warbirds, aerobatic, ultralights, helicopters, and contemporary manufactured aircraft.

From vintage World War II aircraft up to more modern varieties, "Warbirds" in the past have included P-47s, P-51s, and Corsairs. Vietnam era birds include the A-4, A-1, AC-47, C-123, O-2, L-19, Cobra, Chinook, Huey, and Loach.

We can all support the inclusion of an A-37 as a venerable warbird that should be recognized for its role as a primary close-air-support platform in Vietnam. Included in the program schedule is a panel to discuss the aircraft's history and important link in developing the A-10. Peterson is seeking old A-37 personnel from pilots to ground support crews to participate in the panel.

So if anyone of you is interested in participating in the panel, contact us at dragonfly67.72@gmail.com.



"When we drink, we get drunk. When we get drunk, we fall asleep. When we fall asleep, we commit no sin. When we commit no sin, we go to heaven. So, let's all get drunk and go to heaven." *George Bernard Shaw*

From the Archives



(The following is an excerpt from the 8th SOS history, April-June 1972.)

Flying Activities

(U) In May the squadron set a record for sorties in one month, 1,408, and of these 1,317 were combat effective. (See Appendix IV.) The emphasis during the quarter was placed on alert sorties, running close to two-to-one over pre-planned sorties. The alert pad operated in the same manner as before except that the ordnance loads were often switched from week to week. The practice of carrying napalm on both #1 and #2 aircraft was discontinued during the quarter.

(U) During this period, the 8th SOS flew some of its most dangerous missions in and around the city of An Loc, RVN. The majority of the missions flown in MR III were in this area. In mid-May the use of napalm in the area around An Loc was discontinued because of the AAA threat. In addition, emphasis was placed on a 30 degree napalm delivery in other areas of operation instead of the normal 10 to 15 degree delivery.

(U) A total of 3,709 combat effective sorties were flown during the quarter with the loss of two aircraft and one pilot. Battle damage was prevalent during the quarter. Thirty-four aircraft were damaged, and most of the damage occurred during napalm and CBU-25 deliveries. (See Appendix IV.) The primary threat to the aircraft remained 51 cal and small arms, although during the offensive, the communists introduced 23mm and 57mm guns plus the SA-7 (Strella) missile in the siege of An Loc.

(U) Working mainly with Rash, Sundog, Rustic, and Covey FACs, the Raps and Hawks compiled an impressive list of BDA.

Maintenance

(U) The maintenance accomplishments during the quarter stand by themselves. Despite several problems, the squadron maintenance personnel did an outstanding job even though the FORSTAT rating for operationally ready aircraft was rarely, if ever, above C-2. This period included the month the squadron set a record high for the number of sorties flown.

(U) Among the more important maintenance problems was the non-availability of parts and inadequate manning.

Combat Loss

(U) On the morning of 11 May, Hawk 01 flight was scrambled to a troops-in-contact situation on the west side of An Loc. Lieutenant Michael J. Blassie was flying number 2 in the flight. On his first napalm pass, Lieutenant Blassie took suspected 23mm hits in the wing and cockpit of the aircraft. The aircraft impacted north of the target area and no apparent attempt was made to eject.

A-37 Association Memorabilia Items



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



DragonT-shirt
\$21 (includes shipping)
(One left - size L



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 for order form.