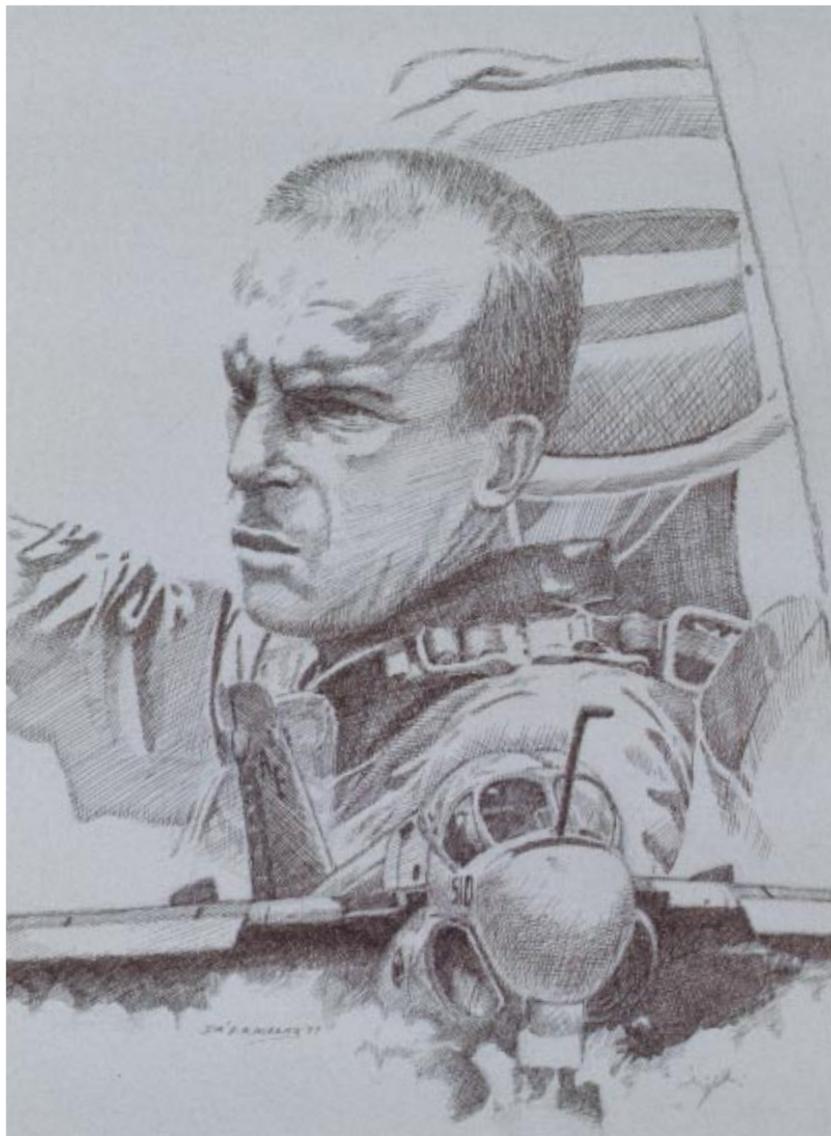


Intruder Tales

Captain Kenneth L. Coskey, USN (Ret.) A-6 Pilot, Prisoner of War

The Grumman A-6A *Intruder* was the last Navy plane I flew, and it was by far the best. I was aboard *America* (CV 66) when she was brand new and we had all new aircraft—the A-6, A-7 *Corsair II*, F-4J *Phantom II*. The A-6 carried twice the bomb load of the A-7 and was faster. You could pull 6 Gs with a full bomb load and it wouldn't rip the wings off. With its inertial navigation system, the *Intruder* could fly in any weather conditions, anywhere in the world and know its exact position all the time.

In Vietnam, a lot of our missions at night were truck hunting, and we liked to fly with F-4s because they could keep up with us. We'd locate a truck using our Airborne Moving Target Indicator—equipment unique to the A-6 which sensed movement on the ground. The A-6 would drop a flare over a target and the F-4s would then roll in and bomb. Another thing the A-6's equipment allowed us to do is fly in between hills, at night, in fog. If you had the guts to do it, you could get down below the hills and fly the valleys—on instruments! This was unheard of in 1968, but it is common equipment in today's combat aircraft. The A-6 was way ahead of its time. Thirty years ago, it was the best!



Navy Art Collection

Erick Marshall Murray of the Naval Historical Center created this pen-and-ink illustration from a 1968 photo of A-6 pilot Cdr. Kenneth L. Coskey. While CO of Attack Squadron 85, Coskey and his bombardier navigator, LCdr. Richard McKee, were on a night mission when they got hit by antiaircraft fire that knocked out both engines and all controls. After they ejected, McKee was rescued, but Coskey spent the next four years and seven months in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." A retired captain, Coskey is Executive Director of the Naval Historical Foundation.

Capt. Rick Hauck, USN (Ret.)
A-6 Pilot, Astronaut

The air war was being fiercely fought over North Vietnam, the Navy needed more pilots, and in the spring of 1967 I was going through flight training. I found that I loved the challenge, adventure and beauty of flying. I thrived on it. I was in heaven.

During jet training at NAS Meridian, Miss., the students assembled regularly to hear firsthand from fleet pilots about their combat experiences. An RA-5C *Vigilante* pilot told of his daring supersonic dashes over heavily defended targets to gather critical pre- or post-strike photos. The A-3 *Skywarrior* driver recalled the challenge of bringing the enormous “Whale” back aboard ship after flying perilously close to enemy defenses to give a combat-damaged strike aircraft a lifesaving drink of gas. The “Scooter” pilot spoke affectionately about “strapping on” his A-4 *Skyhawk*, rather than getting into it, and then dodging surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) while delivering his bomb load down the throat of an anti-aircraft ammunition site. The A-7 *Corsair II* guy proudly extolled the capabilities of the newest airplane in the fleet. And we heard thrilling stories of aerial combat from F-8 *Crusader* and F-4 *Phantom* pilots.

But it was the young lieutenant (jg) wearing the Distinguished



Flying Cross on his crisp tropical whites who made me want to fly the bulbous-nosed *Intruder*. He quietly but forcefully pointed out that the only reason for the Navy to be in the Gulf of Tonkin was to “put bombs on target,” and that the A-6 was second to none at doing that—day or night, fair weather or foul. The *Intruder* crews at the time flew a disproportionate share of the high-risk Navy/Marine Corps missions. I wanted to fly the A-6!

After getting my wings, I went to the gulf with the *Black Panthers* of Attack Squadron (VA) 35 aboard *Coral Sea* (CV 43), then spent a tour as an instructor at VA-42, went on to Test Pilot School, and eventually joined NASA.

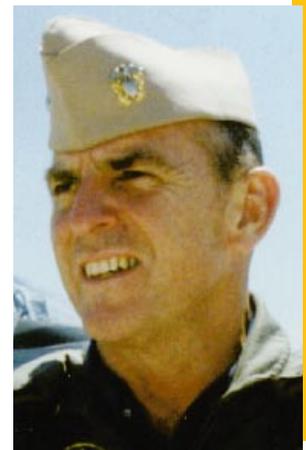
Years later, after I had flown the space shuttle, I was often asked whether piloting a spacecraft was the most difficult thing I had ever done. I invariably replied: “No, I used to land A-6s on aircraft carriers at night!”

VAdm. Richard M. Dunleavy, USN (Ret.)
A-6 Bombardier Navigator
Former Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Air Warfare)

The A-6 *Intruder's* arrival in the fleet began a new era in Naval Aviation. The U.S. Navy had achieved a remarkable ability to “hit the enemy deep in his homeland” in all kinds of weather, day or night. From a bombardier navigator’s viewpoint, the aircraft had a significant impact on the Naval Flight Officer’s career viability. Finally, the NFO was accepted as an equal partner with the pilot in the medium-

attack mission. The camaraderie coalesced into a cohesive, tight team for the entire active life of the A-6 in the fleet. People comment enthusiastically about the aircraft’s capability, which was awesome during its life span, but the positive effect that the *Intruder* had on the tailhook community was infinite.

The medium-attack community has seen its day. Long live Naval Aviation!



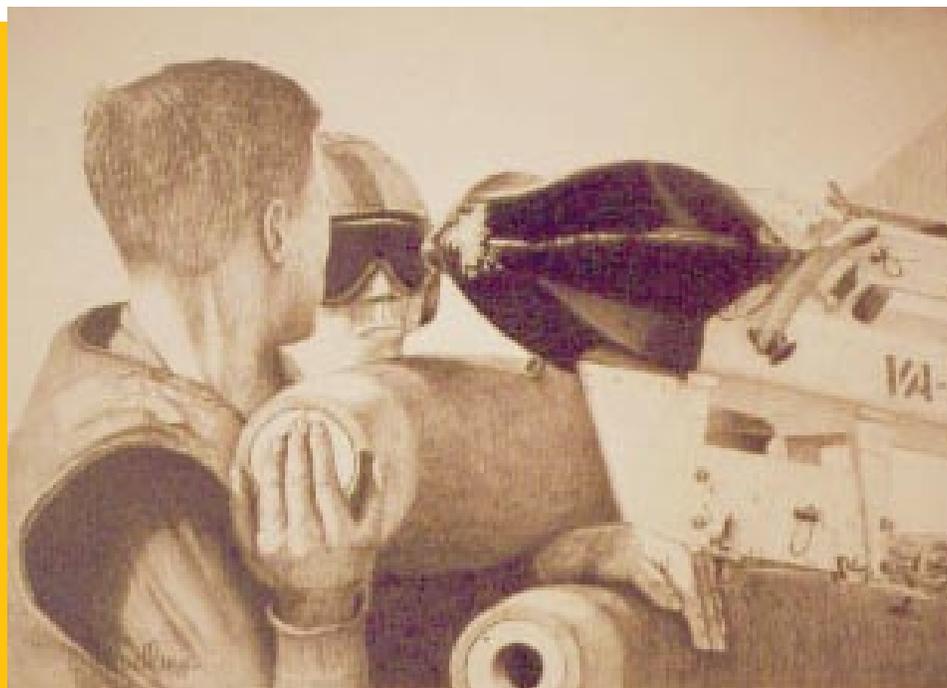
Colonel W. D. “Charlie” Carr, USMC (Ret.)
A-6 Bombardier Navigator



After receiving my commission, I trained in A-6 *Intruders* at Attack Squadron 128, NAS Whidbey Island, Wash. I was hot to trot to fly the A-6. It was brand new and there were a lot of people trying to get into it. The aircraft was really good at what it did. You could deliver ordnance in the worst weather with very little degradation to the radar. The bombing accuracy in the A-6A wasn't that great, but enhancements over time took care of the problem. Gulf War pilots flying the A-6E could put a laser-guided bomb right into the middle of an Iraqi tank.

One of my more memorable missions in Vietnam was when we took out Hanoi Radio, which was the primary North Vietnamese communications site for its troops in South Vietnam. I was flying with

Lieutenant Colonel William Fitch, CO of Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 533. For two days, the Navy and Air Force had been unable to strike the target because of bad weather, so the Marines took a turn at it. We went in at night, at the height of monsoon season, flying as low as possible—300 and 500 feet in the delta, a little higher in the mountains—using radar to keep us from hitting something. By the time we got to the target area, we were picking up anti-aircraft fire as well as surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). After dropping all 18 of our 500-pound bombs, we headed back into the “goo,” ducking SAMs until we were in friendly territory. When we landed and debriefed, we learned North Vietnamese communication circuits were down, so we figured that we were successful.



“Ordies,” pencil drawing, Butch Javellana. Loading 250-pound bombs on this A-6 was hard labor, requiring teamwork. The artist was an aviation ordnanceman with Attack Squadron 75 from 1967 to 1971. He said, “We used to joke about the *Intruder’s* looks—calling it the ‘Flying Guppy’—but the A-6 was the workhorse of Vietnam.”