



## FUJIMI A-4E/F SKYHAWK

By Paul Hackmann

### Background

I hadn't built a jet for myself in a while and I was getting kind of bored with prop jobs. So I spent one Sunday afternoon going through my stash of kits trying to find some inspiration. Once I selected an A-4, I pawed through my USN decals to see if I had anything for it. I finally pared it down to one of two. One of them was the marking for "Lady Jessie" of VA-164. I've always been curious about the story behind these particular markings, but never did any research. Now was as good a time as any, here's what I found out.

During the late 1950s Jessie and her husband Fred Beck hired Dick Perry to work as a part-time dealer at their Reno, Nevada casino, Harold's Club. Dick at the time was a student at the University of Nevada and continued working for the Beck's until his graduation. Over the years of employment, the relationship between the Beck's and their employee grew to the point at which he became like an adopted son.

Following graduation, Dick entered Navy flight training and eventually reported to VA-164 in January 1966. During flight school and in the squadron, Dick was well supplied with pastries and treats by Mrs. Beck. Her care packages were so large that much of them were shared to the rest of the Ghost Riders. Eventually Dick arranged for a squadron party in Reno - the first of several hosted by Lady Jessie, who by then owned the Riverside Hotel and Casino. Other CVW-16 pilots also sampled the famous Beck hospitality as word spread through the air wing.

The close ties between Jessie and VA-164 were further strengthened when Dick named his A-4E "Lady Jessie." However, tragedy struck during USS Oriskany's (CVA-34) 1967 Western Pacific cruise. On 31 August 1967 LCDR Dick Perry's Skyhawk was hit by a SAM and he ejected less than two miles offshore. Though he had a good chute, there was no sign of life. The SAR crew reached the body, determined Perry was dead, and departed the area under orders of the on-scene commander, since the helo was taking fire from nearby shore batteries.

Despite the loss of the man who brought Jessie Beck in contact with VA-164, the close relationship continued. On an especially grand occasion, Jessie hosted a party for both VA-163 and -164 during May 1968. The aviators admired their lady not only for her generosity and kindness, but also for her devotion to her Naval Aviator "sons". The Ghost Riders continued to honor the gracious lady from Reno after Dick's death by displaying her name on each CO's aircraft until the squadron was disestablished Dec 12, 1975.

In July 1971, the Naval Air Station Fallon Administrative Building was named for and dedicated to Dick Perry by Base Commander Cdr. Ramsay Lawson. The dedication ceremony included a Blue Angel performance dedicated to Lady Jessie and a personal appearance by Mrs. Jessie Beck. Ironically, Dick Perry's remains - thought lost at sea - were returned to the U.S. in 1987, the same year of Jessie Beck's death.

## Building the Kit

I used Fujimi's A-4E/F "Topgun" kit to build this particular A-4. While this kit portrays an A-4 Mongoose without the fuselage avionics spine, the kit does have this part included. So, you can build either of the variants of A-4F or E you wish.

Construction begins with the cockpit and forward fuselage. The cockpit assembly and inside of the forward fuselage halves get painted FS-36375. The cockpit fits nicely into the right side of the fuselage, but I had some difficulty in getting the nose wheel well (#65) located. I ended up just tacking it into the opening, then attaching the two fuselage halves together. When they had dried, I reached in from the back and moved the wheel well around until it fit evenly in the opening. Once I got it into the position I wanted, I attached it permanently. The forward fuselage was set aside.

Next came the rear fuselage. The first thing I did was to decide that I did not want to display the speedbrakes open, as most of the static shots I had of A-4's show them closed. I placed the speedbrakes into the openings on their respective fuselage halves and discovered that it was slightly undersized, so there would be some filling and sanding involved. The easiest way to handle this problem was to put some Green Stuff into the speedbrake opening and press the brake into position, forcing the Green Stuff out around the speedbrake and filling the gap. When this had set up, I sanded everything smooth. I had to rescribe the outline of the speedbrake, since the outline disappeared in the process. The two intake duct halves (#67/68) are painted white and attached to the turbine blades (#69). This, in turn, gets attached to the right aft fuselage. *I skipped adding the exhaust nozzle, as this can be added once the fuselage is complete and saves a masking step.* The two aft fuselage halves are put together.

Now came the tricky part, attaching the forward and aft fuselage assemblies together. Care must be taken to ensure that they align vertically and that once together the fuselage must be handled carefully as there isn't much gluing surface. What adds strength to the join is the intake boundary layer separators (#16/17). When these are attached and dry, the fuselage can be handled a little more easily. The intakes are a little oversized and must be filed and fitted with care. To complete the fuselage assembly, I added the avionics spine (#92/93). A little filler is required on the spine where it attaches to the fuselage, but don't overdo it, as there is a noticeable gap on the real thing.

I tackled the wings next. The 'F has 4 wing hardpoints and 1 centerline, so make sure you open them up before attaching the upper wing surface. Also don't forget to open up the holes on the left wingtip for the radar altimeter (#89). Next comes an option to display the flaps down, which I elected not to do. The wings were assembled, then attached to the fuselage. No filler was required to conceal the upper join, but some was required on the lower fuselage to wing joint. *As anyone who has built this kit can attest to, the slat attachment points are very susceptible to damage. I managed to break off two while preparing the model to paint.* The last parts attached were the IFF transmitter (#42), the straight refueling probe (#103) and part #6 (*threat receiver?*).

The model was sanded and rescribed as necessary. Then it was washed, some nose weight was added and put aside to dry. A True Detail's ESCAPAC seat was painted and added to the cockpit. The canopy was Futured, masked and attached with Testors Canopy Glue. *I picked up a bottle of this at the local Hobby Lobby, its great stuff. It dries clear and is much more durable than regular white glue.* In preparation for the final paint, all panel lines, hinge lines and canopy were given a thin application of flat black. Then Model Master's Flat White was applied to the lower surfaces, all the movable surfaces, gear doors, struts and tail hook. This was masked off and a coat of Model Master's Flat Gull Gray was applied to the remaining areas. Next came the masking and painting of the black anti-glare area forward of the windscreen and the red warning areas of the slats.

Several coats of Future were applied to allow for handling, weathering and decaling. Light weathering was done with a combination of oil washes and pastels. The decals went on with no problems. They were sealed with a coat of Floquil Flat. Painting and adding the rest of the parts: horizontal stabs, slats, gear struts, tires, hardpoints, hook, gear doors, tailpipe, etc completed the model. One note on adding the slats, they hang down far too much. I shortened each attachment about 1 mm to get the look I wanted.

It's been quite a while since I've done something other than WWII models. This was a nice way to get back to doing some more "modern" stuff. The kit goes together with a little fussing, but if care is exercised there are no real problems. This marks the second Fujimi A-4 I've completed, the first being Ted Swartz's A-4C MiG Killer. In progress with the undersurfaces painted is a VA-22 A-4B. At the National's, I picked up another couple of other A-4 kits including an A-4M and an OA-4M. I also picked up a conversion and the decals for an Israeli A-4E with tailpipe extension and I know I've got a TA-4 somewhere in the stack. So I see myself beginning these once summer is over and the winter building season begins.

Just an aside, The Nationals allowed me to finish off a MiG-21SMT that I started about 6 years ago. I came across a real nice MiG-21 decal sheet that contained markings for a SMT in 3-tone camouflage. I lost interest in completing the kit at about the point I was going to have to paint it in natural metal. So all I had to do was to find the kit in my stack and start painting. Its now ready for weathering.

## **Markings**

The markings I chose for "Lady Jessie" were applied to A-4F BUNO 155022 in 1969. Of the numerous A-4's painted in the scheme, this was the most colorful. The decals for this aircraft were available on Superscale sheet number 72-315, which was discontinued several years ago. *Just to give you an idea of how long I've had this sheet, I purchased it when I left San Diego for Pensacola in 1985. The hobby shop in Rancho Bernardo was having a ½-off sale on decals and I bought a bunch of USN decals for various types of airplanes.*

This A-4 was painted in the typical scheme of the time, 36440 Gull Grey over Gloss White, with all movable surfaces also Gloss White. The insides of the flaps, speed brakes, edges of the gear doors and inside of the slats were painted Red. The upper tip of the rudder is also painted in Red, signifying the squadron's position within the Carrier Airwing 21.



### Some Aftermarket Parts for the Fujimi A-4s

<u>Manufacturer</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Aeroclub	ABV160 Wheel and U/C	Metal	\$3.00
Eduard	72162 A-4F Detail Set	Etched Metal	\$11.60
Eduard	72149 A-4E/F Detail Set	Etched Metal	\$3.10
Eduard	XS068 A-4 Canopy and Wheels Masks	Masks	\$1.50
FlightPath	72121c A-4 Skyhawk Ladder	Etched Metal	\$4.40