

Skyhawk 887

N13-154908

A-4 on Catapult

from J Mayfield



Brief Aircraft History (courtesy [ADF Serials](#)):

- Last A-4F built.
- First flight 29/06/67 (as A-4F).
- Served in Vietnam on USS Ranger with VA-155 26/10/68 – 17/05/69.
- On USS Hancock with VA-212 02/08/69 – 15/04/70
- Severely damaged in a wire strike 02/07/69 with USN. Fuselage was bent and never fully repaired.
- Before transfer to RAN the aircraft had 712.5 flight hours logged.
- Delivered to RAN 08/71. Unloaded from HMAS Sydney onto RAN Lighter AWL 304 at Jervis Bay 11/08/71 then by road transport to Nowra.
- On board HMAS Melbourne, 'Spithead Deployment' 28/04/77 to 04/10/77 with VF805.
- Wheels-up landing 22/5/78 (LEUT Barry Evans) at RAAF Amberley, following wheel loss aboard Melbourne.
- Withdrawn from RAN service 30/06/83 and stored for sale.
- To RNZAF 07/84 as NZ6218. Converted to A4-K specification. Later upgraded under Project Kahu.
- 2012 sold to [Draken International](#) Lakeland, Florida USA. 1/03/2013 registered as N143EM.

13 Feb 1969: A4G N-13 154908 – Side No. 887

Radar display detached during the very first A4G catapult launch from HMAS Melbourne. Cause: Design Fault for securing the radar.

During this launch the radar panel with its long body extending back into the instrument panel (being not properly secured) came out into the pilot's lap. Unable to eject (because of the large size of the panel body - length and weight) LCDR Da Costa skilfully flew the aircraft with its trim buttons and limited control stick movement to an emergency straight in landing back at NAS Nowra. Being able to survive such a drastic mishap enabled many previously unexplained USN catapult launch fatal accidents to be solved. Thereafter the radar screen in all A4s was secured by a very large extra fittings, especially whilst at sea.

LCDR Da Costa was the CO of VC-724 at this time but took the first catapult after HMAS Melbourne's long refit, as he was one of the most experienced RAN Skyhawk pilots, having trained in the USN with LCDR Dusty King earlier.

Above: This incident early in 887's life could easily have spelt the end for the aircraft and its pilot, when the big radar display slid into the pilot's lap during a catapult launch. Although the RAN had not had unexplained accidents on launch, the USN had – and the survival of this aircraft helped explain what might have happened to them. Story via Phil Thompson.

Below and next page. LEUT Evans' wheels up landing on 22 May 1978 at RAAF Amberley.



PILOT'S SECOND LUCKY ESCAPE!



The NAVY Skyhawk losing a wheel (arrowed) on HMAS MELBOURNE'S flight deck



The Skyhawk approaching Amberley RAAF Base



Safely on the tarmac



The Skyhawk in a sea of foam

NAVY pilot LEUT Barry Evans 26, of Nowra, has been praised for his skill in making a successful crash landing at the RAAF Air Base Amberley in his Skyhawk - his second scrape in three years in an A4.

RAAF observers described it as an "immaculate landing" with only a few scratches on the aircraft's fuel tanks.

Within 13 1/2 hours the Skyhawk was in the air again.

The A4 had been diverted from the aircraft carrier HMAS MELBOURNE after losing the port wheel on a touch and go flightdeck approach.

LEUT Evans' aircraft had been one of four launched for air display practice.

After the aborted landing on MELBOURNE, LEUT Evans' aircraft then air refuelled and headed for AMBERLEY and a "Wheels Up" landing.

LEUT Evans escaped uninjured with only "minimal damage" to the aircraft.

In 1975, LEUT Evans' aircraft had finished over MELBOURNE's bow after failing a landing on her flight deck off Singapore.

He was able to Escape from his A4 on that occasion from some 21 metres below the surface.



The NAVY team which had the Skyhawk back in the air within 13 1/2 hours of the forced landing. Back row (L-R) CPO Cook, CPO Jensen, CPO Fielding, CPO Scott, SBLT Garratt. Front row (L-R) PO White, LEUT French, LS Fleming, PO De silva in front of the repaired Skyhawk at RAAF AMBERLEY

Above: After landing at Amberley, the aircraft needed to be recovered. One of the sailors on the repair team tells the following story:

'The initial incident happened in the AM (Sunday if I remember) and a crew was assembled to go ashore to evaluate damage but we had to wait for the ship to get within range.

Ground crew flew off in Sea King to Amberley Sunday PM once Melbourne got into range. Spares flown up in 748 (Monday or Tuesday). The drop tanks had a bit more damage than a "few scratches", getting them into the 748 for return to Nowra was an exercise in itself. The Skyhawk departed Amberley Wednesday so 'back in the air in less than a day' (as reported by the press above) is misleading.

By this time Melbourne was heading back to Sydney and ground crew could not be flown back on board. Luckily the RAAF band had just been flown up to Amberley and there was a Herc returning to RAAF Richmond and SBLT Garrat arranged for them to ferry the crew to NAS Nowra.'

Crash RAAF Townsville June 1985

Below: The aircraft suffered more substantial damage when it flipped upside down during its time with the RNZN. Despite this, it was repaired over a long period, and now flies with Draken International.





Below. With a new lease on life, N144EM of Draken International conducts a low flypast at the International Red Flag day in Nevada on 25 January 2017. Draken pilots report that their ex-military aircraft are superbly maintained and, because they are not subject to the rigours of military life, are in great condition. (Image: MD photography)

