

North American RA-5C Vigilantes

Recommended Kit: Trumpeter

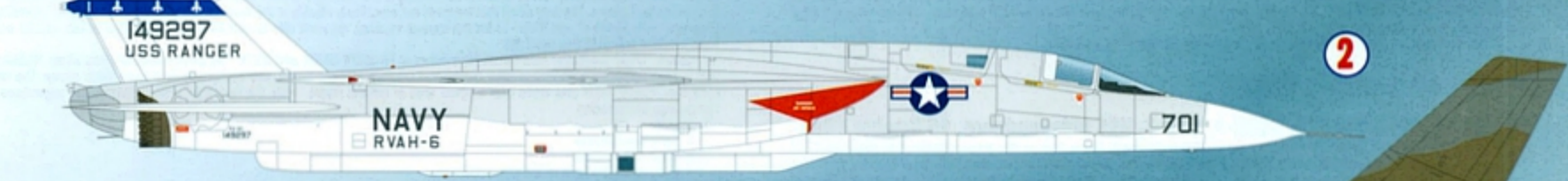
VPD48007
 1:48 Scale Decal

Includes markings
 for the Vigilante
 that discovered
 the Hanoi Hilton!

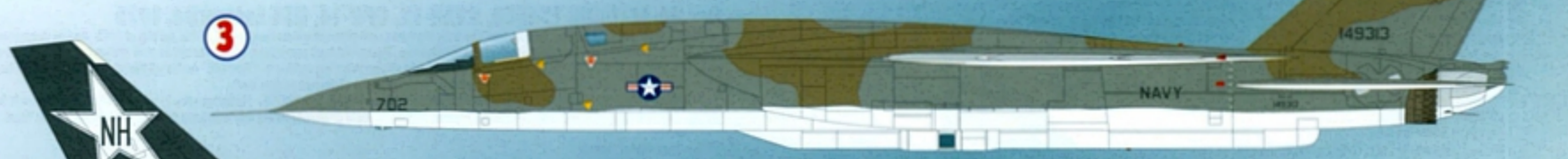
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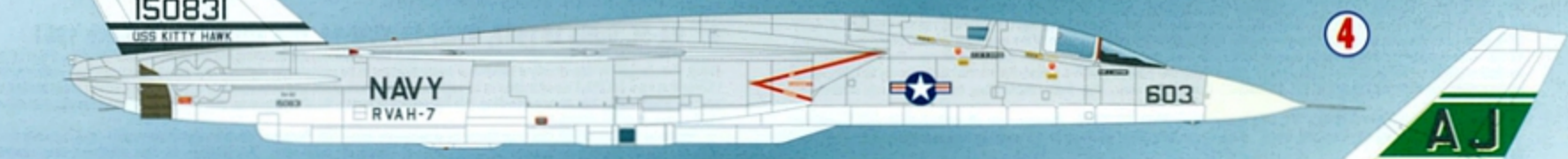
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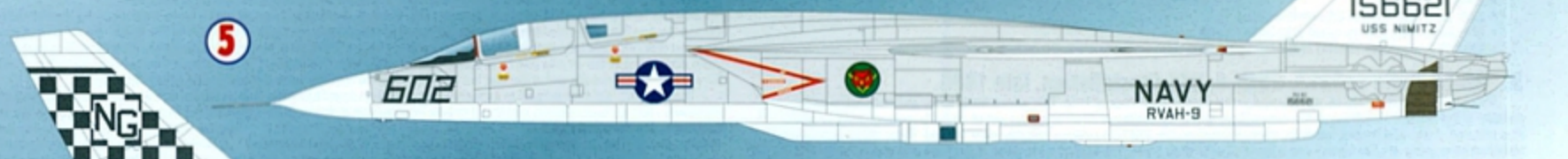
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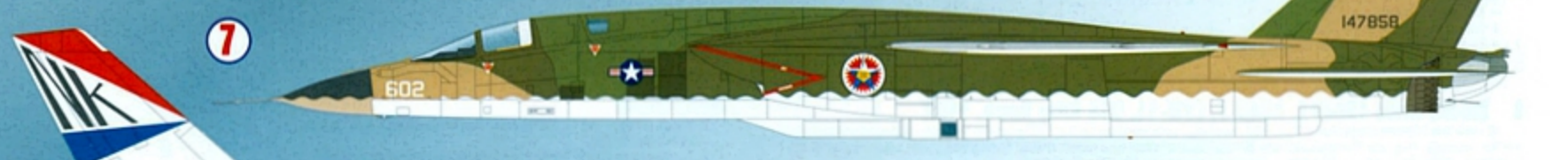
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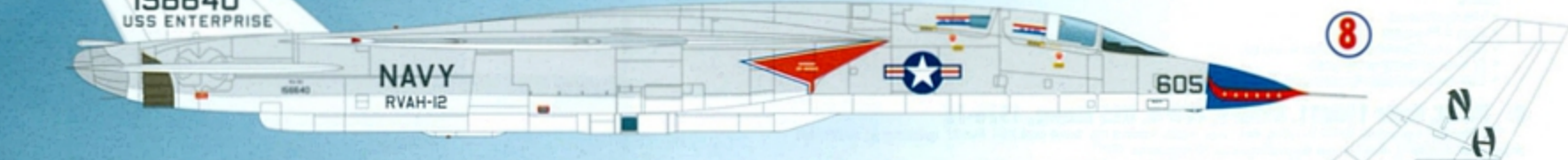
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Thank you for purchasing this Victory Productions decal. We aim to bring you interesting and offbeat subjects, so if you like this one, let us know what else you want to see. And if you have in your possession, or know where to get, good reference material on cool and interesting stuff, we are always interested. Free decals await those whose reference material gets used for decal production!

General Notes:

After years of waiting, the RA-5C, which has consistently ranked at the top of modeler's wish list, has FINALLY come to 1/48 kit form thanks to Trumpeter. Obviously we wanted to concentrate on subjects that had a story - the hallmark of what we do here. For the Vigilante, that's both easy and hard. It performed one of the most dangerous missions of the Vietnam war - Bomb Damage Assessment. This meant that the air defences around the target would already be on full alert. In fact, once the enemy air defences figured out that a BDA flight always followed a strike, they stayed ready waiting for it. Consequently the RA-5C suffered, proportionately the highest loss rate of any USN type involved in the Vietnam war.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty of this project has been the fact that we just could not "do it all." The markings for each of the ten squadrons changed from deployment to deployment. While with some units the markings and motif never changed (RVAH-14 for example), in others, the markings were different for almost every air wing they deployed to (RVAH-7 features at least seven distinctly different markings variants). So we have had to pick and choose.

We received good support from the Vigilante community most significantly through "Boom" Powell - author of the excellent Osprey Combat Aircraft title covering Vigilantes flying during Vietnam. His book was used extensively in preparation of this project.

RA-5C Modeling Notes:

Early RA-5C. Requires YPD48504, RA-5C early standard conversion and early J-79 burner cans - we recommend Aires 4128. If the AN/AAS-21 is not yet fitted, remove the bump from the bottom of the recce canoe.

Late RA-5C. The kit represents a 15xxxx series RA-5C, so little will have to be modified in order to make to use the markings for subjects listed as "Late RA-5C," although we do recommend the Aires 4118 late style J-79 burner cans as a replacement for the kit parts.

Black Box also supplies an excellent cockpit set for the Trumpeter kit - CS48006.

Notes on Specific Aircraft:

1: RA-5C, BuNo 151615, RVAH-1, CVW-7, USS Independence, 16 October 1965

"Comanche Trail 601" is from the RA-5C's second-ever deployment. It was also on this cruise that the then brand new A-6 deployed for the first time. Crew of the Indy joked that the factory tech reps practically outnumbered the crew! The markings that RVAH-1 wore during this cruise are interesting, as they feature the factory shade of pale blue-gray painted over the modex, and other aircraft codes. This was seen only very early in the RA-5C's life. This particular aircraft holds a particularly infamous spot in the Vigilante hall of fame. On 16 October 1965 the aircraft was hit (by either AAA or SA-2, it is unknown which) while searching for SAM sites near Hon Gay. The crew ejected safely. However, both were quickly picked up by local fishermen and became POWs. 151615 became the first RA-5C to be officially classified as "shot down." We've been in contact with "Duffy" in the making of this sheet - and we sincerely thank him for his assistance!

Colors: Standard Light Gull Gray (FS 16440) over Gloss White (FS 17875). Being an early upper wing featured the "wavy" color demarcation pattern on the wings and horizontal stabilizers as shown natural metal. Radome was off-white/buff fiberglass, and the tail cone appears to have been



- Details:
- Early style intakes.
 - Short J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - No IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - No chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

2: RA-5C, BuNo 149297, RVAH-6, CVW-2, USS Ranger, Early 1968

"Field Goal 701" flown by Cdr. C.C. Smith and Lt. John Calhoun holds a significant spot in the history of the Vigilante. In early 1968, photographs taken from this aircraft were the first to show the exact location of the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" in downtown Hanoi. Also notable for this cruise is that in January of 1968, the Ranger and CVW-11 took a break from the Tonkin Gulf and headed north in response to the Pueblo crisis. Once the crisis passed RVAH-6 visited the maintenance facility at NAS Atsugi and received the first installation of the AN/AAS-21 IR mapping gear. After their respite, they headed back into action over Vietnam in March.

Colors: Standard Light Gull Gray (FS 16440) over Gloss White (FS 17875). Radome was off-white/buff fiberglass, and the tail cone appears to have been natural metal. Modex numbers were probably in the more or less standard locations on the flaps.

- Details:
- Early style intakes.
 - Short J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - IR linescan fairing on the canoe (late in the cruise).
 - Chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells (also probably late in the cruise).

3: RA-5C, BuNo 149313, RVAH-6, USS Constellation, late 1966

RVAH-6, along with RVAH-13, participated in the camouflage trials of 1966. This was a study to try and reduce the aerial visibility of the aircraft. In addition to the camouflage, and in an additional effort to reduce aerial visibility, national insignia size was reduced. BuNo and modex numbers were reduced in size and no squadron insignia were applied. Three schemes were tested on all number of USN types - one a basic all over drab green, the second a two-tone drab green and gray scheme and the third, the well known three-tone southeast Asia scheme that the USAF was flying. The RA-5C community featured two of the three test schemes with RVAH-6 testing the two-tone scheme and RVAH-13 testing the SEA scheme. It was determined that not only was there a significant weight penalty associated with the camouflage, the benefit of reduced aerial visibility was not worth the cost - the threat over Vietnam was not from above - enemy MIGs, but rather from below from SAMs and AAA. The trials and any attempt at camouflage were dropped during 1967 after the units returned from their cruises - Aircraft quickly reverted to the gull gray over white scheme. This particular aircraft is one of the two-tone subjects, flying with RVAH-6 during their 1966 cruise aboard Connie. Of particular interest during a cat shot late in the cruise, "Field Goal 702" lost its rear canopy, exposing the RAN. Lt (jg) Shelvin, to quite a breezy ride around the pattern! Fortunately for Mr. Shelvin the "convertible" Vigilante was ably landed back aboard the Connie, no worse for the wear.

Colors: A really good question! The one good color photo of this aircraft is inconclusive, and official records of the colors have not surfaced. Different people looking at the same photo interpret the colors very differently, and we are not going to make any official pronouncements. We will leave the interpretation up to you. We have shown it in colors approximating FS 34079 green and something perhaps between FS 36081 and FS 36118 grey. The belly remained gloss white. The bottom of the radome was off-white/buff fiberglass, and the tail cone was natural metal with the grey color on the upper and aft end parts. Modex numbers were probably in the more or less standard locations on the flaps.

- Details:
- Early style intakes.
 - Short J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - No IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - No chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

4: RA-5C, BuNo 150831, RVAH-7, CVW-11, USS Kitty Hawk, 1972

At least one reference says these "Flare 603" markings were retained for the 1972 cruise to Vietnam - although we believe that the markings may have changed part way through the marathon nine month cruise. During this cruise, covering operation Linebacker, RVAH-7 flew 610 combat sorties, shooting a staggering 504,320 rolls of film!

Colors: Standard Light Gull Gray (FS 16440) over Gloss White (FS 17875). Radome was off-white/buff fiberglass, and the tail cone was Light Gull Gray. Modex numbers were probably in the more or less standard locations on the flaps.

- Details:
- Late style intakes.
 - Long J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - Chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

5: RA-5C, BuNo 156621, RVAH-9, CVW-8, USS Nimitz, 1976-77

"Hooter 602" represents RVAH-9 during their final cruise onboard the brand new USS Nimitz, operating on its first full deployment in 1976/77. RVAH-9 was disestablished on 30 September, 1977.

Colors: Standard Light Gull Gray (FS 16440) over Gloss White (FS 17875). Radome was gloss white, and the tail cone was Light Gull Gray. Modex numbers were probably in the more or less standard locations on the flaps.

- Details:
- Late style intakes.
 - Long J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - Chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

6: RA-5C, BuNo 156614, RVAH-11, CVW-9, USS Constellation, 1971-72

Probably the only sharkmouthed Vigilante in history! Some of the squadron junior officers thought it would be "cool" to paint the shark mouth motif on the aircraft, and the CO allowed it. Unfortunately only one aircraft - "Glen Rock 604" - was

6: Continued

painted in this manner due to the high ops tempo at the time. This was the only RVAH to receive the coveted Presidential Unit Citation - it happened during this cruise! Also during this cruise, RVAH-11 became the first unit to photograph Haiphong harbor as action resumed "up north" after the 1968 bombing halt.

Colors: Standard Light Gull Gray (FS 16440) over Gloss White (FS 17875). Radome was gloss white, and the tail cone was Light Gull Gray. Modex numbers were probably in the more or less standard locations on the flaps.

- Details:
- Late style intakes.
 - Long J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - Chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

7: RA-5C, BuNo 147858 or 145157, RVAH-11, CVW-7,

USS Kitty Hawk, Late Summer/Early Fall 1967

This aircraft in service with the RVAH-11 Checkertails, features the three tone Southeast Asia camouflage pattern flown with RVAH-13 during the 1966 camouflage trials. The camouflage, while not that unusual, applied to an RVAH-11 aircraft, featuring near-full squadron markings make this RA-5C one of the most curious Vigilantes to fly RVAH-11, deployed with CVW-17 had lost three of its aircraft in the 1967 Forrestal fire, returning to port in September of that same year. About the same time, RVAH-13 was finishing up its 1966/67 cruise with CVW-11 onboard the Kitty Hawk. During this cruise Recce-13 participated in the well documented - if ill-fated - camouflage trials testing the three-tone Southeast Asia scheme. In late 1967 RVAH-11 was set to go back to sea, this time with CVW-11 aboard the Kitty Hawk - but needed replacement aircraft. Joining the same airwing that RVAH-13 had just departed, it is likely that the replacement aircraft were from RVAH-13, thus the unusual appearance of the camouflage aircraft in RVAH-11 service. We believe that the squadron markings were applied in the pre-cruise period while the Squadron was involved in work-ups. Since only one photo of this aircraft is known to exist (having been published in just about every RA-5C title), we had to do some connecting of the dots, and careful study of this photo, to determine the details of this particular scheme. The only detail that we could not specifically identify is the BuNo for the aircraft. However, after reviewing Bunos for both RVAH-11 and RVAH-13 for the cruises involved, we were able to narrow down the choices to two aircraft, and have provided both with this decal set.

Colors: USAF Southeast Asia camouflage colors of FS 34079, 34102, and 30219. The belly remained gloss white. Radome was a deep buff/orange fiberglass color (somewhat unusual looking) below, and appears to have been black above. The tail cone was mostly 34079 and white with a small area of natural metal. Note the very tight wave pattern to the upper/lower camouflage demarcation.

- Details:
- Early style intakes.
 - Short J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - No IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - No chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

8: RA-5C, BuNo 156640, RVAH-12, CVW-14, USS Enterprise, 1975

RVAH-12 aboard the Enterprise was the only Vigilante unit present when Saigon fell in the spring of 1975. As the American Revolution Bicentennial celebrations were approaching, Recce-12 had decorated their aircraft in this striking red, white, and blue scheme, including patriotic crew name blocks and intake warning outlines. "Tips 605" featured the blue radome, while her squadron mates "Tips 601" and "Tips 603" featured red and white radomes respectively.

Colors: Standard Light Gull Gray (FS 16440) over Gloss White (FS 17875). Radome was bright medium blue (match to decal), and the tail cone was natural metal. Modex numbers were probably in the more or less standard locations on the flaps.

- Details:
- Late style intakes.
 - Long J-79 nozzles.
 - Late style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - Chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

9: RA-5C, BuNo 151627, RVAH-13, CVW-11, USS Kitty Hawk, 9 March 1967

The history of "Flint River 605" and its crew contains one of the most fascinating stories in all of naval aviation. Then Lt(jg) Frank Prendergast is one of only a handful of naval aviators to be captured in Vietnam and subsequently escape - one source claims that he is the ONLY naval aviator to be captured in North Vietnam and subsequently escape. The method of his escape is not only what makes this story interesting, it is the source of quite a lot of controversy. None of the published reports that we've read agree in all the details.

Because the CO's RAN had to go home on emergency leave, Cdr. Putnam selected Lt(jg) Prendergast (who normally flew with Lt. Cdr. Al Waltz) to fly the fateful mission of March 9th with him. The mission for that afternoon was coastal reconnaissance. Cdr. Putnam violated rules for the mission profile in order to attain the required objectives by ignoring the normal 3000-5000 ft altitude profile. He flew at a scant 350 feet, and less than a quarter mile off the beach. Hit by small arms fire near Long Chau, the aircraft began to burn, and Cdr. Putnam initiated ejection for both crew members.

Here is where the reports begin to diverge. Cdr. Putnam is officially listed as MIA - some sources claim that he didn't survive the ejection, while crews in escort aircraft reported observing a navy pilot running along the beach. Escort aircraft also reported observing two fully deployed parachutes - although later "indigenous" reports indicate the remains of an American pilot were discovered in the vicinity and time frame that correlate with this incident. Cdr. Putnam was not with the group of 591 Americans released at the end of the war, but finally in 1988, his remains were discovered and returned to the USA.

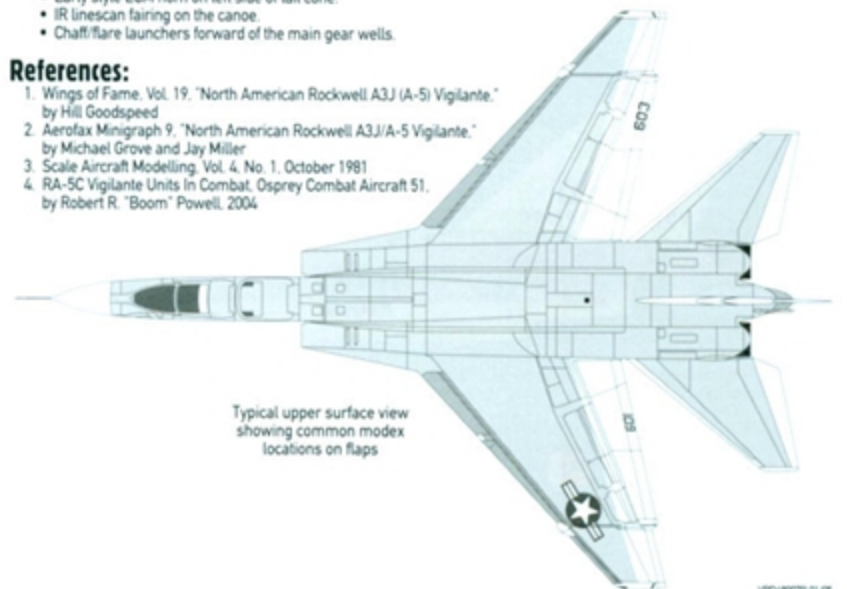
The story of Lt(jg) Prendergast is a much better one. Most reports indicate that he landed in the water some 200 yards off the beach. Two or more soldiers waded out to take Prendergast prisoner, while escort aircraft began putting suppression fire on the beach. The remaining soldiers fled the area, leaving only two escorts with Prendergast. Both determined correctly that the escorts wouldn't fire on their own man. Prendergast had his .38 service revolver out, which one of the soldiers confiscated. Details of what happened next are all over the place, but seeing as the rescue SH-3 was approaching, Prendergast knew he had one chance. One of the two soldiers escorting him was covering him with his AK-47, while the other was covering him with the confiscated .38 revolver. What the two enemy soldiers did not know was that Prendergast was also carrying a "hold-out" pistol, either a 22 or 25 (details vary) automatic in his parachute rigging. He quickly pulled the hold-out gun and shot the soldier covering him with the AK. What he also knew that the other soldier did not was that the .38 was partially empty - again details vary. Some report that he intentionally left the first two chambers empty, others claim that he fired the tracer rounds into the air to try and signal the escort that he was alive. In either case, when the second soldier reacted and tried to shoot Prendergast, he was left with only a click as the .38 tried to fire an empty chamber. Prendergast dispatched the second enemy soldier with his automatic and swam out to be picked up by the SH-3. Another version has one of the soldiers, the one with the AK, ducking beneath the water when the escort would make a pass. Prendergast then shot the first soldier (the one covering him with the .38) while his partner was ducking for cover, and then hit the other soldier as he came up out of the water. Running to a sandbar, he bought time by again putting his hands up, only to have the door gunner in the SH-3 dispatch the second enemy soldier with his M61. In either case, it was an incredibly daring event, one for which Prendergast was awarded the Navy Cross.

Colors: Standard Light Gull Gray (FS 16440) over Gloss White (FS 17875). Radome was bright medium blue (match to decal), and the tail cone was natural metal. Modex numbers were probably in the more or less standard locations on the flaps.

- Details:
- Early style intakes.
 - Short J-79 nozzles.
 - Early style ECM horn on left side of tail cone.
 - IR linescan fairing on the canoe.
 - Chaff/flare launchers forward of the main gear wells.

References:

1. Wings of Fame, Vol. 19, "North American Rockwell A3J (A-5) Vigilante," by Hill Goodspeed
2. Aerofax Minigraph 9, "North American Rockwell A3J/A-5 Vigilante," by Michael Grove and Jay Miller
3. Scale Aircraft Modelling, Vol. 4, No. 1, October 1981
4. RA-5C Vigilante Units in Combat, Osprey Combat Aircraft 51, by Robert R. "Boom" Powell, 2004



Typical upper surface view showing common modex locations on flaps