

“We Support a Drug Free America”

The significance of the “We Support a Drug Free America” bumper sticker on the Raidermobile harkens back to the era of the late 1980s and early 1990s when illegal drug use was on everyone’s mind. First lady Nancy Reagan had told us to “Just say no” to drugs, and there were drug wars on, seemingly, every front. Being stationed in southern California was no exception. Gang wars raged over who had the right to sell what to whom and where. Kids had it pounded in their heads that drug use was wrong (Think of the “This is your brain on drugs” PSA commercial). Illegal drug awareness was everywhere. Along those same lines, but I am uncertain of the origin, a few of us were approached in late December ‘89 or early January ‘90 about painting a hangar sized version of the very popular “We Support a Drug Free America” bumper sticker (which included the “Drug Use is Life Abuse” logo and, of course, our beloved Eagle, Globe and Anchor) on the west side of the hangar directly above the world famous “Raiders” patch for a drug awareness fair that would take place, if memory serves, early February ‘90.

LCpl. D. E. Paulson(Paulson), LCpl. G. W. Webster(Greg), and LCpl. D. L. Howery, Jr. (Howie) were commissioned by Maj. Arlen Rens for the task which involved first making a large enough image to transfer to the hangar, transferring it, and painting it on the hangar at a height of approximately 40 feet above the ground. The size was originally determined by what centered up on the door column above the squadron patch, but a slight modification (+6 inches to the left) was made due to an errant pass with a paint roller full of red paint during the blocking in portion of the project.

The next issue we had to deal with was getting the three distinct pieces the right size to properly occupy the space created on the hangar. Howie had some experience with up sizing drawings after transferring “The Ultimate Bubblechaser” from a pencil sketch on notebook paper to the door of the ‘352 Hydraulic shop. Mathematically, it was possible, but not completely practical for the size and complexity of the project. It was suggested that an overhead projector used for transparencies be used to create the larger size required. That was all well and good, but how do they get it on the hangar? Butcher paper was used, and many pieces were married together to create the individual portions of the sticker. Small holes were perforated in the butcher paper by pattern transfer wheels (A small spur type wheel used by seamstresses to transfer patterns onto fabric) using the overhead transparency, sized correctly, as a guide. Yellow chalk line chalk in cheesecloth bags would be used to transfer the dotted lines to the wall and then the painting would be done “inside the lines” to complete the project.

So images were projected in the squadron weight room where there existed a wall that no one cared had extra small holes in. The images were transferred through the paper, and then secured to the hangar. Yellow dust covered the ground in front of the hangar as the banging of chalk bags on small holes created a guide for the painters. A slight image of what would come to be existed on the wall when viewed from a distance after the butcher paper was removed. Another little piece of trivia was that being on the manlift doing this little exercise was harrowing to say the least, as at least two of the tires on the thing were always low. This caused the unit to sway more than usual side to side anytime it was moved. In spite of all these things, the hangar sized bumper sticker was completed in time for the

drug awareness fair. All three artists originally signed the piece in the lower right hand corner, but it was painted over by Paulson later that evening stating that it was too arrogant to sign their names on the hangar. The following morning, this change had been noted by Maj. Rens. Howie was summoned by Maj. Rens concerning the change. When the reason was given, it was made abundantly clear that the image would remain on the hangar for years to come and those names had better be a part of it. Knowing the paint hadn't cured completely from the modification, Howie put the names back on the left side of the image where they remain to this day.

Twenty-six years have come and gone since that long forgotten drug awareness fair. A wedding was held there in 24 July 1993. The Laguna Hills fires were in October of 1993. Howie got out 22 June 1995. The last KC-130s left 15 April 1999. The base (MCAS El Toro) has been closed since 2 July 1999. The area had grown to weeds, and the hot sun shone on the west side of hangar 297 fading the once proud announcement into near oblivion. A recycling company called TVI put hangar 297 back into business as a storage facility. Howie and his wife were able to visit the hangar and painting he helped make on 5 July 2013. Not unlike the Raidermobile, the hangar has taken its share of Mother Nature's wrath.

Composed by Del Howery Jr. 11 April 2016



Hangar 297 on 9 March 1991 (photo courtesy of Susan Buhite)