

The A-10 Thunderbolt II: 'Hog' to My Friends

When it comes down to it, the word “ugly” comes to mind when viewing the A-10 against the backdrop of sleek modern jets like the F-14 Tomcat, F-16 Fighting Falcon, F-15 Eagle, and F-1 Mirage. The A-10 was officially named the “Thunderbolt II” in a Fairchild Republic ceremony marking the delivery of the 100th production airframe in April, 1978. The parallel to the successful close air support role of the original Republic P-47 Thunderbolt was made in the naming of the A-10A, although much more descriptive names abound for the plane.

As early as 1973, an Air Force writer, pondering this well... ugly new addition to the USAF inventory, recalled the nickname for the Republic F-84 was the ‘Groundhog’, or ‘Hog’ (also ‘Lead Sled’), because of its difficulty to obtain takeoff lift on hot (or any other type) days; when the swept wing variant appeared, it was promptly named the ‘SuperHog’. In Vietnam, Republic’s F-105 Thunderchief became the ‘UltraHog’—although the F-105 is best known as the ‘Thud’... in any case, this AF writer paused, and mused (in print!) that perhaps this new mean, lean and well, ugly, new bird should be known as the ‘Warthog’. This unfortunate, well-intentioned but highly observant soul is credited therefore with the unofficial naming of the A-10... perhaps to the detriment of his career. Air Force leadership, in a fit of early political correctness, laziness, or momentary lack of imagination, rebelled against their new War Baby being known as a rather unappealing member of the porcine family; the official naming ceremony slapped a more sanitary name on the A-10—well, at least in official print.

Another version of the naming of the A-10A is told by former Ordnance Engineer at Aerojet-General (Chino, CA), William J. Bowser, when the ammunition for the GAU-8 was developed. During the first in-the-air test of the GAU-8 the pilot fired the gun and the smoke was so thick it extinguished the engine(s)! It also coated the nose with black soot. To fix this problem they added two shield deflectors on either side of the barrels. These gave the plane a ‘snout’ which prompted the sobriquet 'Warthog' from one of the pilots. The powder in the 30mm shells was reformulated to be smokeless and that solved the problem. The shields were removed—but the name remained.

One will never know...

How to Piss an A-10 Pilot Off...

Go ahead. Ask your local A-10 pilot about his “Thunderbolt II”. More than likely, he’ll pause (repressing an urgent need to strangle you), and politely and firmly instruct you on the proper form of address for the A-10, and its pilot: “that plane there is the ‘Hog’, and I am a ‘Hog’ driver. Now stand directly in front of the nose sir, and I’ll demonstrate the gun on... er, for you...”

Score points and look real snappy if you can pronounce ‘Hog’ as ‘Hawg’. That is, more than one syllable. And be damned proud when you say it. Much like its unofficial namesake, the A-10 is rugged, dependable and quite dangerous.

Unfortunately, Fairchild (Republic) fell victim to the failing military aviation economy of recent years (Grumman is the current product support contractor)—yet they have left in this plane a legacy that recalls their strong and proud design history. Whatever you decide to call it, thank the men and women of Fairchild for creating a plane that does its job beyond the call of duty, strikes fear deep to its enemy—but more importantly, brings its pilot home.