Navy kept F-14s

For 20 years, researchers have known how to fix a defect blamed in 31 crashes and six deaths. Only now is the Navy changing the jets.

By Jack Dorsey
Staff writer

HAMPTON — An engineering problem with the Navy’s F-14 Tomcat that has caused at least 31 of the jets to go into a spin and crash was solved 30 years ago by two jets — at $38 million each — have crashed as a result of the problem. Six aviators have been killed.

In the early 1970s, when a solution to the problem was discovered, the cost of fixing all the Navy’s F-14s was estimated at $30 million. Two men who designed the solution had their ideas rejected.

Putting in the (fixed) system was the equivalent of one or two planes for the whole fleet,” Gilbert said. “We knew they were losing two to three (planes) a year at that time.

“We said: ‘Hey guys! We’ve shown the system works. You got the flight test. Your pilots say it works. Do it for God’s sake.’

“They didn’t. They chose to do some other things.”

Both men said they weren’t criticizing the Navy for its delay and recognize it frequently takes 15 to
testy Congress, did not correct the flaw. It still hasn't.

Asked why it has taken so long to install the correction device, the Navy pointed to money and design concerns along the way.

The problem was not completely defined until 1979, said Lt. Mike Tabb, a Navy spokesman in Washington. It then took until 1984 for a system to be designed that would be fitted into the emerging F-14D models.

"But that (fix) had to be eliminat-

NASA researchers Luat Nguyen, left, and Bill Gilbert urged the Navy to adopt their solution to keep the F-14 from going into a flat spin. About 25 percent of F-14 accidents have been caused by this flaw.
The two men who designed the solution, Bill Gilbert and Luat Nguyen of NASA’s Langley Research Center in Hampton, say they urged the Navy to adopt their redesign.

“We estimated then the cost of redeveloping a new system would top $60 million, but we didn’t realize the Navy would close the rudder and slower the deployment of the new system for another 10 or 15 years,” he said.

The program, they say, was nearly shelved after the crash. The Navy recognized the need for a new system but, cut back the deployment schedule to 1980.

The Navy, wrestling in those days with a whole list of problems with the jet, plus austere budgets and a slow recovery in Los Angeles.
4 U.S. jets bomb Iraq after attack

The planes weren't damaged but the clash shows that enforcing a 'no-fly' zone is risky.

By Mark Thompson
Knight-Ridder News Service

WASHINGTON — After a two-month lull in hostilities, Saddam Hussein's forces fired on four U.S. jets patrolling northern Iraq on Friday, triggering a retaliatory strike by the American warplanes, U.S. officials said.

Pentagon officials said they doubted that the United States or other nations would be able to control the north of Iraq without a no-fly zone.

Boucher said that one F-4G was hit by a rebel group in control north of Iraq and that officials were trying to ensure that Saddam Hussein was not involved.
as soon as possible following new funding, he said.

Beginning next year and continuing through the year 2000, all of the Navy's 436 F-14s will be fixed at a cost of $70 million.

In the interim, the Navy has instructed its pilots not to put the plane through critical maneuvers and has restricted certain moves of the F-14's tail rudders. The flat spin is created when the plane falls while spinning horizontally. It is hard to halt the spin because the wings flow across the wings providing the jet with lift.

Of 123 crashes in the F-14's history, at least 31, or 25 percent, have been attributed to the uncontrollable spin, the Navy acknowledges.

Gilbert and Nguyen say they spent nearly every day during a two-year period trying to find out why good pilots, flying good jets, got into trouble, spinning out of control toward the ground, during certain maneuvers.

Once they solved the problem — initially in 1972 and then again in 1982-83 in a joint project with the Navy and Grumman, the F-14's manufacturer — they thought they would see the design implemented. The two even received awards for their work.

But nothing changed.

Nguyen also admits to frustration at not seeing the system installed earlier, particularly since he and Gilbert worked daily for at least two years to pin down the problem.

"Obviously everybody who develops something would like to see it used immediately," Nguyen said. "But I think we all recognize people have to make choices in terms of resources they have available to them. It could have been they made a decision to use that money to do something else that could have been equally important."

In the early days of the F-14, the Navy found 43 major flaws in test models of the plane, including engine stalling and difficulty in recovering from spins. The Navy, too, was frustrated with a state-of-the-art aircraft that seemed to have more problems than it deserved.

In 1976, soon after ordering 403 aircraft, the Navy discovered its engines — Pratt & Whitney TF-30s — were not beefy enough. It wanted new engines at an added cost of $167 million and immediately ran into problems with Congress.

One congressman, Wisconsin Democrat Les Aspin — the new secretary of defense — said he had "grave reservations" about the need for a new engine.

"The Navy can prove that a souped-up engine is needed for fleet air defense, I believe its proposal should be rejected," Aspin said at the time.

Money problems plagued the first models of the F-14A through the 1970s and into the 1980s. It wasn't until 1987 that the F-14A Plus models were fitted with the new F100-GE-400 engine. In 1981 that model became known as the F-14B.

At Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, the Navy still has about 90 of the "A" models and 55 to 60 of the "B" models. A subsequent model, the F-14D, with new engines and digital avionics, is found only on the West Coast.

It is the engine power — or thrust-to-weight ratio, as aircraft engineers call it — that was critical to the early aircraft models, Gilbert recalls.

Such power is especially important when pilots want to summon it to make a sharp maneuver while setting up for an aerial dogfight, he said.

Earlier F-14 models didn't have enough muscle and in certain maneuvers the jet became sluggish, Gilbert said. "They used to say it got a lot like a walting elephant," he said.

"You would get a lot of side (air) flow so the engine was eating some (intake) garbage." Often, he said, the jet would lose the use of one of its two engines.

"One of the concerns then was from pilots who would say, 'We are losing an engine and the remaining engine would cause us to spin,'" Gilbert said.

It was later determined that the engine thrust was not necessarily putting F-14s into uncontrollable spins.

Gilbert and Nguyen, working in NASA's Differential Maneuvering Simulator at Langley, designed their own model and then remotely control it to determine what worked and what didn't. They also dropped 700-pound scale models out of a helicopter to test their theories.

What was occurring, said Nguyen, was that pilots were trying to control the airplane when it exceeded its performance limits — and at the same time they were trying to get into a dogfight. Instead of trying to correct the sudden problem with the jet's stick, which controls the wing's ailerons, pilots should have been rolling using the jet's foot pedals, he said, to move the tail's rudder.

"If you used it, right you were okay," Nguyen said, "but if you went in there and made one mistake you could be in trouble."

The fix came from a system Nguyen and Gilbert designed that connected the ailerons with the rudder. The device simply would prevent the plane from being overcontrolled.

"They lost the plane in Patuxent River in 1976," Gilbert said. "Anyway, we got (embarrassed) when it splashed and said NASA can't just sit by and say the system design is no good. NASA's reputation was on the line."

It was in 1980 that the Navy agreed to get serious on a fix for the plane and formed a task force. The F-14A Plus came together by 1983, according to Gilbert, when the solution was finally agreed upon by all the parties.

But even after that design had been conceived, no decision to use it was made until recently.

"I guess I'm just pleased it is finally being used," Nguyen said. "I really think it will pay off."
Officer’s attorney sums up case, says King was lying

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Outside court, politicians and religious leaders preached peace.

Inside, Rodney King was denounced by a defense attorney Friday as a self-serving liar willing to violate the civil rights of four police officers to escape his own due punishment.

"Ladies and gentlemen, he was lying to you!" attorney Michael P. Stone shouted at the jury considering charges that the white police officers violated King’s civil rights. "He repeatedly lied to keep from going back to prison."

The day’s closing arguments left only summations by one defense attorney and rebuttal by the jury’s scheduler scheduled for Saturday. The judge said he would then instruct jurors in the law and place the case in their hands.

Stone represents officer Laurence Powell, who clubbed King the most times in a videotaped beating March 3, 1991. In addition to Powell, the attorney argued on behalf of Sgt.

Stacey Koon, officer Theodore Briseno and former officer Timothy Wind.

"If Rodney Glen King has a stake in the outcome, he’ll lie," said Stone, reminding jurors that King has sued the city for millions of dollars.

"Talk about civil rights violations," Stone said in closing arguments in the officers’ second trial.

Later, defense attorney Paul DePasquale began his summation by attacking the prosecution’s key use-of-force expert, Sgt. Mark Conta, who called much of the beating a violation of Police Department policy.

DePasquale, who represents Wind, tried a probationary officer, called Conta a lying, hypocrite and department "mouthpiece" who "ludicrously suggested Wind should have tried to stop the beating, even though a supervisor was present."

"Even if officer Wind were aware of its proper conduct, he doesn’t have the choice, mutiny," said DePasquale.

HOPE

continued from Page A1

coocked with a metal pipe, kicked and pummeled, robbed and left bleeding in the street. Where a car ran over his foot, shattering his ankle. Where a black family finally rescued him.

AgUILAR, 44, collected the debris for a memorial he wants to see built around the words of his heart-rending poem, "L.A. Storm."

It would be a tribute to the 53 killed, the 2,400 injured, the 55,000 who have sought comfort and the millions wounded in spirit.

Reading his three-paragraph poem out loud makes the self-employed photographer weep into his shirtsleeves.

He doesn’t want his poem published, except as part of a memorial. But his comments alone sound like poetry:

"This is what I’d like to give to the people of Los Angeles. To those who with a kind heart saw us as someone who maybe did not deserve what happened to us. To those who passed away."

Aguirar blamed no nalice toward his unknown attackers. But the rebuilding effort will not mean if it doesn’t mean a change of heart, he says.

"It’s the people who are more important than anything."

Lightning rod for change

Million-dollar promises buoy spirits in the donated downtown offices of Rebuild LA. The nonprofit organization heads the effort to lure major enterprises to riot-torn areas.

More than 25 companies have pledged $500 million in financial help, including such corporate giants as Nissan Motor Corp., Pioneer Electronics, Bank of America and Vons Cos. Inc.

"We’re a lighting rod for change," says Tony Salazar, co-chairman for Rebuild LA.

"Every issue and problem out there, people are looking to HLA for direction."

But along with the clamor for help comes skepticism. Critics say the organization

room: Of the more than 1,000 buildings damaged, over half have been demolished as not being rebuilt.

Rioter ponders ‘next time’

Thomas Smith taps his finger on a downtown jewelry store display window packed with shiny gold and diamonds. His mouth broods into a toothy smile.

"In there, we took it all," he says, getting nervous glances from a clerk inside the shop. "Gold, diamonds, watches. We just swept it clean."

Smith still gets a rush when he thinks of the frenzied first night of the riots. The home and the addicts amassed small fortune in minutes, breaking into dozens of shops in the nation’s second-largest jewelry district.

The fortunes are gone now, spent as fast as they were attained. Police, who arrested about 3,000 suspected looters, believe most of the booty was traded for street gear — crack, heroin, marijuana.

Smith, 42, never enjoyed the $30,000 in jewelry he stole. Within hours, this man named "Lucky" was arrested. His loss still hasn’t stopped.

He served eight months in jail. He lost his job as assistant manager of a downtown warehouse. His wife left him. And now he lives near Skid Row in a cardboard box across the street from where he was arrested.

Police found Smith urinating in the bathroom of an electronics store while dozen loos scattered — their arms filled with DVDs, televisions and VCRs. Smith says he was drunk and high on $10 worth of crack he was trading a stolen watch.

"God whipped my butt for being greedy," Smith says. He let slide the first time, but he whipped me for trying to take more stuff. I shouldn’t have gotten greedy.

But Smith says he and other looters do care that Los Angeles Police Chief Williams plans to put about 7,000 of the department’s 7,500 officers on duty when the rioting starts.

"They’re going to get fired on," he says. "’ Ain’t nobody going to stop people from firing justice."