



# Fist of the Fleet Association

a non profit 501 (c) (19) military organization

## NEWSLETTER

January 2014

Preserving the Past Providing for Today

Promoting the Future

### WINTER EDITION

By: Jerry "Ricochet" Fritze

On Monday, January 6th, as the polar vortex swept down in to the western Great Lakes, the temperature with wind chill fell to minus 47 degrees. The last time I had experienced weather that brutal was way back in the late autumn of 1981. I was north of Killdeer, North Dakota working as a surveyor up in the area around the Missouri River when a clipper roared in out of Canada and the wind dropped the temps in to the negative 50 range. That marked the end of the season for us, but due to the backside snow I was stuck at the Bismarck airport for 24 hours before I could finally fly back to Los Angeles and warmth. All Michelle and I can do right now is just make sure our emergency lockers are full and then batten down and seal off all of the drafts. The forecast for the last part of January into the first part of February is for more of the same. And while we up here have been averaging 10 degrees or more below normal our friends in Lemoore are averaging 10 degrees above normal with days in the 70's and nights right around the freezing mark. I remember very well standing watches on the flight-line or in the hanger in the winter and complaining about the cold. After all, I was just a skinny kid from Los Angeles more used to the hot temps in the desert cities east of Palm Springs, or the seemingly endless beaches that stretched away to the north and south, lost in a haze of sand and heat. To the east rose the mountains and to the west the great mystery; the sea and the song of the sirens and their whispered invitations. The great oceans beckon to us all but few rarely hear its call.

Maybe it's something in my Danish make-up or in all the books I read and the movies I watched; but as I became more of an avid reader of military history, as opposed to a student, I heard the call ever more clearly. There was such yearning in that call; so lonely, so seductive. I answered, and I don't even know why. I had seen the destroyer flotillas at The Pike in Long Beach before they moved south, the ships at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, the Naval Weapons Depot at Seal Beach, and the carriers at North Island; the great, gray warships that ruled the waves. When my friends and I finally went to see the recruiter in Feb '74 I requested Naval Aviation. I didn't care where or what I did. There were six of us who would go together to Naval Training Center, San Diego under the "Buddy System" and after Boot I never ran in to any of them again; we were spread to the winds of the world, or, in military parlance, the "needs of the service". After "A" school at the NATTC, Millington, TN I wound up, in all places, at Lemoore NAS. Me, a Southern California beach bum, in the heart of the Central Valley. A few weeks at VA-122 and then in early Apr '75 I reported to VA-25 just in time to make a det on USS Ranger, CVA-61. The sea had called; I had answered and so went down to the sea one day in a gray ship, one of the mightiest vessels in the world. There were no words I could have used then and there to express what I felt. No metaphors for something so large, and at the same time so small. From the openness of the flight deck to the claustrophobia of my rack every day was a new experience. I was a "cherry" so I made mistakes; we all did. I got lost, I didn't get things done quick enough, or safe enough. We were in the middle of Carrier Qualifications so flight quarters wasn't as bad as it could have been, or would be in the future, but the pace of the drills was killer as we dragged ourselves from one evolution to another. I followed the "old hands" around for two weeks learning what they would teach me. "Old Hands", that's a laugh. The oldest guy I worked with on Days wasn't more than 22. Most of the younger guys would be getting out in a few months, and most of the older guys would just sit around and gripe about everything from the drills to the chow to the weather.

A learning experience indeed. When we returned to NASL I was moved from Day Check to Nights and the whole process started all over again. But the sea had called, and had awoken the Muse. Hers' is a voice just as compelling and no less seductive; and I answered. In the beginning it was for fun, something to fill the hours; in the end it became therapy. I have never stopped writing since those first days. *(Cont'd on page 5)*

#### Mission Statement

**Perpetuate the history of Naval Aviation Squadrons VT-17, VA-6B, VA-65, VA-25 and VFA-25,  
Remember deceased veterans and comfort their survivors,  
Conduct charitable and educational programs,  
Foster and participate in activities of patriotic nature,  
Assist current active squadron members, and  
Provide assistance to family members in times of emergency.**

## President's Message

As we enter 2014, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the membership for your continued support of our Association. Your participation and financial support have enabled us to continue our very successful Educational Grant Program and initiate a new annual award in the form of the LTjg Harry D. Jones Memorial Award for Excellence. For those able to attend Fist 13 at Tailhook, a special thank you for making the effort and monetary outlay that made this one of our finest reunions. Our strong relationship with our active duty shipmates of VFA-25 was enhanced even further by their attendance in force at Fist 13. That in itself made a great reunion a very special one.

As a reminder to those who do not receive our online newsletter, elections were held at Fist 13 and Nick Johnson and myself were reelected to our second and final terms as Secretary and President respectively of FOFA. At the direction of the Board of Directors the membership agreed to a new Board position in the form of a Member at Large and Al Gorthy was elected for the initial three-year term.

I am also very happy to announce that my former boss and retired RADM Robert "Nuts" Nutwell has graciously agreed to take on the responsibility of Fist Historian. This is a vital position that has been nurtured so ably by Skipper Scott Smith for many years. The Association owes Scott a sincere thank you for his significant contribution to compiling our Fist History. Nuts will now be coordinating with our webmaster, Bob Schreiber, to update the Fist History site online. Jerry Fritze has also compiled a great deal of Fist historical info in his newsletter preparations, which I'm sure will be beneficial to Nuts' efforts. Thank you all in advance for the important work ahead.

As reported by FOFA CFO Chuck Webster, the Association is maintaining a stable financial status and we are pleased to be receiving more frequent Educational Grant requests from the squadron. No doubt these requests are the result of the encouragement displayed by the leadership of VFA-25. On that note, the squadron will be holding a COC on February 20<sup>th</sup>. I know the entire Association joins me in extending our sincere appreciation to Skipper Ryan "TSU" Smith for his continued support and open communication with FOFA. We wish you the very best in your future endeavors. XO David "Frosty" Snowden will be assuming command of VFA-25 and we pledge our ongoing support and congratulations as you proudly take the reins as Fist One.

It is time to consider the venue for Fist 15 and we await your input and perhaps volunteering to assist in preparations. Please feel free to contact me with your ideas. We have also discussed the possibility of forming a Membership

Committee to stimulate future growth of the Association. If you have an interest or ideas on how to help, please step forward. We need to get more of the F-18 Hornet community involved and help lead our Association into the future.

Have a great year ahead.

Gary "Dome" Kerans

OFFICERS	
<b>President:</b>	<b>Gary L. Kerans</b>
2740 Whispering Way Cir.	
Prescott AZ 86303	
Cell 928-925-5099	
Email domeaz@me.com	
<b>Vice President:</b>	<b>Warner Butler</b>
31689 Whitman Way	
Philomath OR 97370	
Tel 541-292-7275	
Email warnerbutler@peak.org	
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Nick Johnson</b>
231 Rainbow Dr. #13190	
Livingston TX 77399	
Tel 936-499-8051	
Email nrjohn@yahoo.com	
<b>Treasurer, CFO:</b>	<b>Chuck Webster</b>
39224 132nd St.	
Bath SD 57427	
Tel 605-229-3940	
Email cwebster@nrctv.com	
<b>Sergeant at Arms/PR:</b>	<b>Bob Schreiber</b>
949 Crystal Park Blvd.	
Clifford Township PA 18407	
Tel: 570-780-4356	
Email robert.a.schreiber@echoes.net	
<b>Member at Large</b>	<b>Al Gorthy</b>
9134 W 131st Pl	
Overland Park KS 66213	
913-681-9026f	



### Blue Angels Tour Dates

Mar 15 NAF El Centro CA	22/23 March AFB
29/30 NAS Kingsville TX	
Apr 05/06 Lakeland FL	12/13 Ft Smith AR
26/27 NAS Ft Worth JRB TX	
May 03/04 St Louis MO	10/11 Vero Beach FL
17/18 MCAS Cherry Point NC	21 USNA MD
23 USNA MD	24/25 Jones Beach NY
31 La Crosse WI	

## \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ FINANCIAL NEWS \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

By: Chuck "Pooh" Webster

Thanks to the generosity and contributions from our Membership the financial health of the Association is on solid ground. As of December 31, 2013, the Association has a balance of \$28,191.78 in savings/checking with the Navy Federal Credit Union.

One of the main indicators of the Association's financial health and stability is the continued growth of its dues paying members. This number increased during 2013 with five new life members and fourteen annual members paying their dues. Annual Members are reminded to make their 2014 payments either via PayPal or check.

Finally, there was a highly successful Fist Reunion at Hook '13 in Reno last September. With the registration of members, non-members, guest, shirt sales, member gifts to cover the meals of the active duty squadron members present at the banquet, and a raffle of wine glasses we had an income of \$9,938 to cover the reunion cost of \$9,009. The Ltjg Harry Jones Award had donations \$906 to cover the gift of \$500 to the awardee, Lt. Andrew Peterson. The Association made a gift of \$500 to the Naval Aviation Squadron Log in Pensacola. The other major expenses were the printing and mailing of the directory, cost covering our web page, and the creation of the traveling Ltjg Harry Jones Award for a total of \$3,351.

During the convention I was asked by several members about how much money do we have in the educational grant fund, how much have we given and are the squadron members applying for the grants? So I went back to the beginning using the software we have to track our financial history and I compared cancelled check stubs to the software. Total educational donations over the years have been \$29,926.05, and during that same time total educational grants paid out to squadron members were \$20,325.52. During 2013 the educational fund had contributions of \$1,325 in donations with the Association making three Educational Grant payments for a total of \$777.16. So yes, I would say that squadron members are applying for the educational grants. Today, we have \$9,600.53 in the educational grant fund. Remember, that any donation to the Educational Fund is deductible for federal income tax purposes and a letter will be sent to you for your tax preparation.

### **FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM**

By: Dennis Laack and Zip Rausa

AT-1 Toby Smith received a FOFA Grant of \$160.00 as he matriculates through DeVry University in pursuit of his Bachelors Degree in Technical Business Management. The Educational Grant fund also received a generous donation of \$500.00 this year from Scott and Carol Mitchell. Thanks go out for their on-going support. As reported in the financial news the total amount available in the fund for disbursement \$9600.00. The grant program was established so that enlisted personnel could receive additional assistance as they seek to advance their educations in higher learning. As our world becomes ever more complicated under-graduate and graduate degrees become more and more necessary to succeed in today's post-military market place. It should be foremost in everyone's thoughts in this day and age.



AT-1 Toby Smith receiving his reimbursement

### **FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION OTHER NEWS**

Scott Smith has decided to retire as the historian and editor of the Fistory website: <http://www.fisthistory.org/> Robert "Nuts" Nutwell, VA-25 '73-'76, has graciously accepted the position. As Editor "Nuts" will continue to maintain the information contained within it and will provide corrections and additions to our Webmaster "Pistols."

Thanks, Nuts!



**Have you paid your 2014 Dues?**

Annual Dues: \$25/YR

Life Time Dues \$200

Mail dues to Financial Officer:

Chuck Webster 39224 132nd St. Bath SD 57427

**Only Voting Members receive a copy of the Directory**

**Become a Voting Member!**

**Visit the Base Exchange at**

**[www.fistofthefleet.org](http://www.fistofthefleet.org)**

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## SKIPPER'S CORNER

Welcome back from the holidays Fists!

The Fist team here in Lemoore had a relatively quiet holiday season. It started busy with a Carrier Qualification detachment aboard USS CARL VINSON and the return of our last of three TOPGUN detachments for the year just prior to a fantastic squadron holiday party at the Spuds restaurant here on base. After mid-December, efforts to reduce operating costs kept the field closed for much of the following three weeks. This reduced pace provided a welcomed break during which the squadron was able to get ahead on maintenance and time off prior to celebrating the New Year.

By the time you read this, the squadron will be back in Florida for a three-week detachment to Eglin AFB in support of F-35C chase and pilot currency requirements. Jay Stone and Bruce Marcus captured the mission well in the winter edition of *Wings of Gold*. This time we are expanding our training regimen to include Close Air Support (CAS) missions with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field (the 23<sup>rd</sup> includes USAF PJ's and Joint Terminal Air Controllers trained specifically for Special Operations missions). The detachment will also give us another chance to refine our skills in Basic Fighter Maneuvers (BFM) versus the local USAF F-22, F-16 and F-15 pilots.

As we look to the future, the Fists are continuing preparations for deployment next year, this time with CVW-7. Despite our air wing change last August to CVW-9 and expectation to deploy with them, we now join the USS EISENHOWER / CVW-7 team later this year as their lone west coast hornet representation for an east coast work up and deployment. As always, the Navy teaches us to stay flexible. All are looking forward to broadening perspective by executing operations in the Atlantic as well as enjoying the diverse Mediterranean port calls.

In February I will turn over the reins of this great squadron to a great leader, CDR Dave "Frosty" Snowden. As such, I thank the Association for the incredible support, camaraderie and mentorship over the past three years.

All the best to the entire Fist family in 2014!

Very Respectfully,

Fist One



**FROM THE COCKPIT** By: LT Colin "MEME" Newton

Back to work Fists!

As 2014 begins, VFA-25's schedule is packed with many exciting training opportunities. When the squadron took a break for the Holidays, we had just gotten back from a CQ Det and were about halfway through our Air to Ground Training phase. After a few back in the saddle flights, we were right back in the A/G Syllabus. Day to day sorties mainly focused on JDAM and LGB employment, however, our future section leads were able to get their initial Night Strafe Qual. LT's Blackman, Lovrencevic, Castillo, and Ely pointed their jets into a pitch black hole with little to no moonlight and squeezed the trigger obliterating their targets. Following our spin up on JDAM and LGB tactics, we started flying Close Air Support (CAS) missions with Navy SEALs in Fallon. Finally we had an opportunity to execute what we had been focusing on for the last 5 months.

At the end of the month, the Fists will be heading back to Eglin AFB to support VFA-101. Our schedule will consist of CAS flights with the Air Force 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Tactics Squadron (STS) and finishing up our Air to Ground phase with Mining and Harpoon employment. After Eglin, the Fists will fly back to Lemoore for a few weeks of BFM. Word on the street is that we will be returning to the days of two-a-day football practices. Show up, brief, fly, debrief, and then do it all over again. After that, we'll be rotating back to Florida for a missile shoot at Tyndall AFB.

In closing, this month we said farewell to a few Fists. LCDR Chris "Meat" Dentzer, LT's Benjamin "Mario" Rothenburg, and Andy "PD" Peterson had their last flights with VFA-25. Meat moved on to the Naval War College in Newport Rhode Island, Mario will be PCS'ing to VFA-106 to be a RAG Instructor, and PD is going to be an adversary pilot with VFC-111 flying the sneaky F-5. Farewell to all, and standby PD, you'd better have your defensive game plan down before we show up in April.

And so it is, I remain a poet and a songwriter at heart. Life has taken me from one end of the county to the other. After living for 10 years in Tempe, AZ in '03 we moved up here to Madison, WI; where the spring is always green, the summer skies are storm-filled, the fall full of color and the winters cold and white. And still, the sea calls; as I know she ever shall. In March we are heading to a spot off the Florida Keys for a few days, and the gulf breeze will be a tonic to soothe the longing for awhile. And there in the breeze and the sound of the gentle waves, and in the crying of the sea birds and the salt tang in the air I will again be transported back in time to a place where I stood as a young man and marveled in both wonder and fear. And here for the first time I present my second composition. Not long ago I wrote "Deck Dancing" for the Jan '12 Newsletter. In it are the echoes of this early endeavor.

## ***Flight Deck***

Winter, 1977

On deck I stand with the wind in my face, my heart now beating in a quickened pace

As I watch this deadly dance unfold, a tale of power unspoken nor told.

Who now in their land-locked life could ever know this pain, this strife?

I stand here now where it all takes place, this fatal dance of deadly grace.

Shaking I stand on the bow, feeling something surging now as the first plane noses into place,

So soon we'll launch her into space.

Now the mighty engine roars, a brief salute and off she soars thundering, hurtling down the deck

With a banshee scream that you can't forget while we on deck will stand and wait,

But find no rest in the short, short breaks.

A symphony of sight and sound, through hours long both night and day;

Upon the flight deck I find my place, with the sun on my neck and the wind in my face.

Hours go by but there is no rest, the proud birds return to this, their nest

And we must sweat to recharge these craft, to keep them flying high and fast

As one by one they come to land, guided by steady eyes and hands

And another mission goes in the books; I can't believe how tired we look.

But, soon again they must into the piercing blue of the cloudless skies,

The craft of gray and white now wait for the pilots who will dance with fate.

On the flight deck we stand down, silence fills the air, no sound

No words but the whispering seas from the endless oceans surrounding me.

One last glance, then I go below, weary, as so few can know,

And though days of war now are past still sailors pray that peace may last

Or once more we shall fill the skies and cargoes of death will rain from on high.

*On board USS Ranger CV-61*



## NAPALM



Napalm is an anti-personnel weapon. "Napalm" is a portmanteau of the names of two of the constituents of the gel: naphthenic acid and palmitic acid. "*Napalm B*" is the more modern version of napalm and, although distinctly different in its chemical composition, it is often referred to simply as "napalm"

**Forms of Napalm:** Napalm B is chemically distinct from its predecessor Napalm. It is usually a mixture of polystyrene and benzene, used as a thickening agent to make jellied gasoline. One of the advantages of this new mixture lies in its increased safety while being handled and stored. Many accidents had been attributed to personnel smoking around stockpiles. Napalm B has a commonly quoted composition of 21% benzene, 33% gasoline (itself containing between 1% and 4% (estimated) benzene to raise its octane number), and 46% polystyrene. This mixture is more difficult to ignite than napalm. A reliable pyrotechnic initiator, often based on thermite (for ordinary napalm) or white phosphorus (for newer compositions), has been used. The original napalm usually burned for 15 to 30 seconds while napalm B can burn for up to 10 minutes.

**Development:** Use of fire in warfare has a long history. Greek fire, also described as "sticky fire" is believed to have had a petroleum base. Thickened burning compositions proved their advantages. The development of napalm was precipitated by the use of jellied gasoline mixtures by the Allied forces during World War II. The latex that had been used in these early forms of incendiary devices became logistically impossible to use during the Pacific Theater of Operations, since natural rubber was almost impossible to obtain. (The Japanese Army had overrun all of the rubber plantations in Malaya, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand.) This shortage of natural rubber prompted the chemists at American companies such as Du Pont and Standard Oil, and researchers at Harvard University, to strive to develop factory-made alternatives - artificial rubber for all uses, including vehicle tires, tank tracks, gaskets, hoses, medical supplies and rain clothing. A team of chemists led by Louis Fieser at Harvard University was the first one to develop synthetic napalm, during 1942 for the U.S. Armed Forces. From 1965 to 1969, the Dow Chemical Company manufactured napalm B for the American armed forces. After news reports of napalm B's deadly and disfiguring effects were published, Dow Chemical experienced some boycotts of all its products, and its recruiters for new chemists, chemical engineers, etc., graduating from college were subject to campus boycotts. The management of the Dow Chemical Company decided that "its first obligation was the government." Meanwhile, napalm B became a symbol for the Vietnam War. On July 17, 1944, napalm incendiary bombs were dropped for the first time by 14 American P-38 Lightning aircraft of the 402d Fighter Squadron / 370th Fighter Group on a fuel depot at Coutances, near St. Lô, France. Further use of napalm by American forces occurred in the Pacific Theater of Operations, where in 1944 and 1945, napalm was used as a tactical weapon against Japanese bunkers, pillboxes, tunnels, and other fortifications, especially on Saipan, Iwo Jima, the Philippines, and Okinawa, where deeply dug-in Japanese troops refused to surrender. Napalm bombs were dropped by aviators of the U.S. Navy, the United States Army Air Forces, and the U.S. Marine Corps in support of their ground troops.

**Effects on people:** When used as a part of an incendiary weapon, napalm can cause severe burns (ranging from superficial to subdermal) to the skin and body, asphyxiation, unconsciousness, and death. In this implementation, explosions can create an atmosphere of greater than 20% carbon monoxide and firestorms with self-perpetuating windstorms of up to 70 miles per hour (110 km/h). One of the main anti-personnel features of napalm is that it sticks to human skin, with no practical method for removal of the burning substance. Napalm is effective against dug-in enemy personnel. The burning incendiary composition flows into foxholes, trenches and bunkers, and drainage and irrigation ditches and other improvised troop shelters. Even people in undamaged shelters can be killed by hyperthermia/heat stroke, radiant heat, dehydration, suffocation, smoke exposure, or carbon monoxide poisoning. The firebombing raids on German cities, e.g. Dresden and Hamburg, frequently caused death by this mechanism. One firebomb released from a low-flying plane can damage an area of 2,500 square yards (2,100 m<sup>2</sup>).

**International law:** International law does not prohibit the use of napalm or other incendiaries against military targets, but use against civilian populations was banned by the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in 1980. Protocol III of the CCW restricts the use of all incendiary weapons, but a number of states have not acceded to all of the protocols of the CCW. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), states are considered a party to the convention, which entered into force as international law in December 1983, if they ratify at least two of the five protocols. The United States ratified the convention but isn't party to Protocol III and has used napalm in many conflicts since the substance's invention.

Source: Wikipedia

## FISTORY - LANG VEI: THE AFTERNOON

John Seats had his hands full, and had no time to marvel at the destruction wrought by the continuous stream of aircraft. Furiously taking notes on available aircraft and weapons, maintaining air traffic integrity while handing out vectors and targets and keeping up a steady flow of communications with the pilots and the men in the bunker his mind was becoming more focused on what needed to be done: if those men were going to be saved it had to be soon. William Ritzmann and Bob Hagan had come and gone, laying in their ordnance and buying more time. But every time the aircraft would leave the NVA would reappear from the jungle or rise up out of craters and from behind ruined buildings to assault the TOC once more. Their tenacity was amazing. The area around the camp was littered with burnt vehicles, the dead and the dying and the TOC itself was a wreck. At around 1315 the ABCCC channel cracked to life again: "Covey 077, Hillsboro, Navy Canasta flight inbound, ETA 1330." "Copy, Hillsboro."



The ruined TOC

Once again two Skyraiders from VA-25 were overhead, LDCR Smith and Lt. Nichols were in and out in no time, dropping further MK 81 and MK 82 bombs in and around the camp, suppressing the NVA and driving them back down in to their holes or the surrounding jungle. Every minute they were overhead was another minute of life for the Green Beret in the bunker, another minute to formulate a method of escape. Seats became worried about his fuel state but around 1400 hrs Bruce Goodhue in Covey 226 arrived on station and with a sigh that was both relief and worry John Seats was on his way back home. "Hillsboro, Covey 226, over." "Go ahead Covey 226, this is Hillsboro." "Hillsboro, 226 is now on station over Lang Vei, what traffic do you have for me?, over." "226, at this time there are no aircraft available to vector to your location, copy?" "Hillsboro, say again, there are no assets?" "Affirmative 226 but be advised the duty carrier is preparing to launch. We have an ETA of 1500 hrs." "Copy 1500 hrs Hillsboro, 226 out." An hour. Those guys might not have an hour. Looking over the camp Goodhue could see the NVA out in the open, sitting by their weapons, looting bodies and poking their noses here and there. They didn't seem to be in a big hurry. They certainly weren't pushing another assault at present.

The main force NVA troops were well trained and well equipped with good leadership and sound tactics. However, their greatest failing during combat operation was a lack of flexibility in the field. They had no if-then plans, no contingency scenarios. They were given a set of mission objectives, and once these were obtained they would often simply sit down and wait for further orders. In this case their objective was to seize and hold the camp at Lang Vei and secure Route 9; kill any South Vietnamese or local tribal puppet forces, and kill or capture all of the Americans. It certainly seemed to them that they had met all of their objectives. They were in possession of the camp. They had eliminated all of the tribesman, the surviving Americans were hold-up in a crumbling bunker and they were holding Route 9 from Lang Vei to Laos. Surely the Americans would be compelled to surrender or they would finally be eliminated. It was only a matter of time! The Americans had thrown air power at them but it had not interrupted or put a halt to their mission. They had suffered severe casualties but were still an effective fighting force. It was *just* a matter of time. Unfortunately for the NVA troops that time ran out at 1500 hrs.

"Covey 226, Hillsboro." "Hillsboro, GO!" "226 confirm, Canasta flight inbound, 4 aircraft, 402 has the lead." "Roger, Copy Hillsboro!" It was now or never.



PT-76 tanks destroyed along the perimeter road just outside of the camp.

As CDR Skelton led his 4 aircraft southwest towards the battle he took a moment to reflect on the entire days' activities. Something had changed, something was....*different*. This was no indiscriminate bombing of a suspected truck park, no attack on a defended bridge or some barge in the river. This was troops on the ground in desperate need of support; the kind of support that only he and his pilots could bring: devastating, pin-point accuracy from low altitude, right in the face of the enemy. That was it! The face of the enemy! For the first time they could see them, see their weapons and vehicles, watch their movements. For the first time they were making a real difference, and lives hung in the balance. And that made this time....*personal*. Once again he was filled with adrenaline as his radio cracked to life with more urgent appeals: "Canasta 402, Covey 226 report your pos, over." "226, 402, southeast at 10 miles, 6000 AGL, you should have us in sight momentarily, over." "Copy 402, be advised it's GO time; prepare to cover evac!" "Roger evac. 226." "Canasta flight, right echelon at 2000." And so once more the air began to tremble with the sounds of the approaching Skyraiders as the Wright R-3350's, at full combat throttle throbbed and growled and announced their menacing intentions.

On his left wing sat Lt Jordan in 405, on his right the second section leader LCDR Ron Bolt, 406 and then Ltjg Hill in 413 as suddenly the camp flashed beneath them and they briefly saw below them the wreck and ruin of war. "Canasta 402, Covey 226, make your first pass northwest to southeast of the camp and clear those gooks off the road!" "Copy 226. Canasta Combat Trail at 3000, maintain 1000 foot sep." Breaking to the left and reforming the pilots prepared to release the first of the 8-Mk 81 250 lb bombs each carried; and slung from their inboard pylons was a 350 gal Napalm canister ready to use where ever directed by the FAC. 226 was going to have his hands full pulling this off.

## FISTORY - LANG VEI: THE AFTERNOON

"402, make a pass on the north side of the camp, west to east along the tree line." "Copy, 226." While Bruce Goodhue continued to work the Skyraiders ever closer towards the compound two additional FACs arrived on scene to help coordinate the arrival of the ground forces and helicopters that would provide the final elements of the evacuation. Jim Biltz, Covey 685 would coordinate the helos while Tony Sazanowicz, Covey 255 would maintain radio traffic integrity. CH-46 helos from the 1st Marine Air Wing who were supporting operations at Khe Sanh were now en route to the old Lang Vei Camp where they hoped to pick up the surviving Green Beret. An extraction force consisting of jeeps and led by First Lt. Quy for the Vietnamese Special Forces was even now slowing their approach to the new camp. They held in place a few clicks away and watched as the four gray and white Navy aircraft continued to pound the base. "402, 226, make a pass down the road to the east with 20 mike." "Copy 226." "Hill, push down the road and lay in suppressing fire on targets." "Copy, lead." Hauling around and leveling out at 150 ft Ltjg Hill made his run east along Route 9. Not far from the camp he could see troop and vehicles. Finger on the trigger he started to line up when suddenly his eyes opened wide with recognition. Shit! Friendlies! Banking hard to the left and climbing out he flashed over the jeeps and back towards the fight. First Lt Quy was unaware how close his mission had come to failure. "Lead, 413. Friendly forces to the east, must be the relief group!" "226, 402. Extraction forces in sight to the east of the camp." "Copy 402. Put your Nape on the jungle to the west from north to south." "Copy 226." Goodhue now used the Napalm to create a break between the camp and any supporting NVA troops. Now the plan he had agreed to with the survivors in the TOC could be brought in to play. "402, 226. Can you make three runs on the central camp building with 81's, Danger Close?" "226, 402. Confirm Danger Close, on the building?" "402, Negative. Danger Close around the building, 50 yards or less." "Copy 226, 50 yards or less." Three passes; expending their remaining bombs as close to the TOC as 25 yards. And each concussion wave shook the crumbling structure, nearly knocking the wounded survivors inside to their knees. After the last run there was one more act to play out. "Canasta, need you to make three dry runs over the camp, as low as you can get." "Copy 226, Three dry and low." Hopefully the NVA would keep their heads down.



Skyraider releasing ordnance from 1000 feet



US Marines CH-46 helos over Vietnam

As the helos made their approach to old Lang Vei Lt Quy was ordered to close on the gates. At the same time Lt Longgear was given the go ahead to leave the TOC and make for the camp entrance. With Longgear on point the Green Beret moved out of the TOC, killing a few NVA who were sitting around and counting looted money that had been used to pay the Bru tribesmen not more that 2 days ago. Moving to the northeast corner of the camp the little group slowly traversed the 75 yards to the perimeter, crossing the broken and blackened earth in astonishment. The camp was gone. Only a couple of overturned tanks were visible. Air Power had obliterated everything. As Paul Longgear looked around a Skyraider suddenly appeared over head. Looking up, he could see the pilots eyes, and raised his hand in acknowledgement. LCDR Ron Bolt rocked his wings in salute and sped off to the east with his squadron mates. The survivors boarded the jeeps and left for the helos that finally arrived at the old Lang Vei camp.



Napalm Strike

The Battle of Lang Vei had ended with the NVA in command of the ruins and still holding Route 9 from the camp west to the Laotian border. The NVA claimed to had lost 90 soldiers but US estimates put the number from 250-300. Of the 24 Americans 10 were killed or missing and 11 wounded and they lost over 200 indigenous troops. All of the remaining equipment left in the camp was now in the possession of the NVA. Between 7 and 9 NVA PT-76 tanks had been knocked out by recoilless rifle fire, mortars, LAWS and air strikes. The 15 hour battle had comprised of 2 phases: the NVA night assault and the daylight air response. But the fight for the camp was still far from finished and February 8th would see further blood shed. But for the pilots of VA-25 the fight for Lang Vei would wind up having a meaning that none of them could foresee.

*"On the whole, it may be encouraging to reflect on the many instances of history which prove that in war attempts thought to be impossible do often, for that reason, become possible and practical because nobody expects them." Benjamin Franklin*

## NEXT TIME IN FISTORY - LANG VEI: TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY