



# Fist of the Fleet Association

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

## NEWSLETTER

July 2013

Preserving the Past Providing for Today  
Promoting the Future

### SUMMER EDITION

By: Jerry "Ricochet" Fritze

Last May the U.S. Navy's X-47B drone became the first unmanned aircraft to complete a cat shot from the deck of the USS George H.W. Bush (CVN-77). After a flight of an hour and five minutes it touched down at the NAS Pax River in Maryland following a series of touch and goes. A second X-47B completed a carrier-style landing at Pax River and then just this month one of these machines completed 2 out of 3 traps on board the GHWB. I can't say that I am thrilled about this latest technological development; in fact I am rather underwhelmed. Drones can do a few things well. They can provide real-time, on-site intel, can strike a building, vehicle or other high-value target such as a bridge; but there are several missions they cannot fulfill. They cannot interdict large concentrations of men, vehicles or material. They cannot provide close air support. And in a high threat environment I question their survivability from multiple SAMs, AAA sites or enemy aircraft. Technology is only a tool and too much reliance on technology can have damaging consequences.

The USS Guardian (MCM 5) ran aground on the Tubbataha Reef, 400 NM SE Manila, Philippines. One significant reason for the grounding was an inaccurate digital chart used for the navigation that misplaced the reef by about 8 NM. One of the axioms of the early computer age is still relevant: garbage in, garbage out. And it's not just that the charts were bad, we no longer teach navigators the fundamentals required to be deep-water sailors. Look-outs, if there are any, can't identify ocean hazards such as reefs or shallow water wrecks. It was the failure of technology, compounded by the overconfidence of her captain, that led to the loss of the HMS Bounty. A ship that normally would have a trained crew of nearly 200 sailors had in fact only 16. When the electrically-driven pumps failed there was no back-up system that could be operated manually. Even if there was the ship was grossly under-manned and would not have been able to operate the pumps and handle the sails during the storm once the propulsion system failed. She was also overdue for a massive overhaul and may have had a rotten hull. When technology fails, and the human condition no longer has the benefit of experience to prevail then disaster must follow.

I applaud the decision last April of Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to cancel the "Distinguished Warfare Medal" for drone operators. When they perform their functions, it's from a climate-controlled room far from the battlefield. Recently several of these operators claimed to be suffering from "PTSD" from the knowledge that their actions had killed people, and they had "watched them bleed to death". They will get no sympathy from me. I have friends who were, or are, combat pilots. Many of my friends served in Viet Nam, or are Marines who served in Desert Storm. All of them are proud of what they did, and are honored to have served. And while many of them may suffer from those traumatic experiences of their youth they are not afraid to stand up and say "It had to be done, so I did it." It's not a video game, it's war. Deal with it.

In a few short months we will all be in Reno with the Tailhook gang the the newly formed A-7 Association as well as other reunion groups. See you there.



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

#### 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

Fist 13 at Hook 13 is just around the corner as many members finalize their plans to attend what promises to be a great reunion of shipmates and their families. We will join with the Tailhook Association Sept 05-08 as we all commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and repatriation of our POW's in 1973. John Ascuaga's Nugget Hotel in Sparks, NV adjacent to Reno will host this great event. Additional information about our Fist Reunion and registration procedures are available on our website at [www.fistofthefleet.org](http://www.fistofthefleet.org). For those receiving this Newsletter in the mail I have included separate instructions on how to register to attend Fist 13 and Hook 13. You will first need to call and make a hotel reservation with the Nugget as rooms are filling up fast and our block of rooms have been returned to Tailhook for distribution.

Our Fist 13 dinner and business meeting will be held on the arrival evening Thursday 9/05 starting with a no host cocktail hour at 1800. Attire is business casual, with ties optional. This was the only open timeframe to hold our gathering. Dinner is included in your Fist registration fee. The highlight of the evening will be the presentation of the LTJG Harry D. Jones Memorial Award for Excellence to the first recipient from the Junior Officer ranks of VFA-25. We hope to have several active duty members of the squadron in attendance as our guests. After the dinner and meeting we will retire to our Fist Hospitality Suite on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. Tailhook is providing this space for us at no cost. We will be required to purchase all alcoholic beverages from the hotel due to NV liquor laws, so the bar jar will be present for your contributions.

When you arrive at the Nugget and after you check in to your room, please check in next with Hook 13 on the second floor. They will supply name tags and usually a duffel bag to carry items from the many vendors. After you have your Hook 13 nametags stop by our Fist Hospitality Suite to check in with FOFA where we will have your shirts and libations. As mentioned in earlier newsletters and emails we are suggesting two particular events at Hook 13 for our group participation. They are the "Bug Roach Mixer" on Friday evening the 6<sup>th</sup> which is casual/flight suit attire and the Hook Banquet on Saturday evening the 7<sup>th</sup> which is coat and tie. We will arrange group seating together for the Saturday banquet. The "Bug Roach" is hors d'oeuvres and usually 3 drink tickets per attendee @ \$40 each. The banquet is \$59 each. You can sign up for these when you register with Tailhook. There are several other events planned at Hook 13 that you can choose from based on your interests.

Once again to clarify, you must register with the Tailhook Association in order to attend Hook 13 and Fist 13. I strongly urge that you also join Tailhook Association as a member if not already so. The cost is the same on an annual basis. The registration for Hook 13 is \$65, which includes one guest of your choice. You can then select the events you desire to participate in on the Hook 13 registration page or form. Then you must register separately with FOFA either on our website

### OFFICERS

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or the mail in paper form. If your annual dues are current, or you are a Life Member the fee is \$65 for yourself and \$65 for each guest. Non-member fees are \$80 each and \$80 per guest. It pays to get your dues current and register as a voting member. These registration fees cover our dinner Thursday night and a portion of the Hospitality Suite expenses.

If you have not already made plans to attend Fist 13 at Hook 13 I sincerely hope you will consider doing so. At this writing we have approximately 46 rooms reserved and around 90 intended attendees. A current list can be found on the Fist website under the Reunion page. We look forward to seeing old and new friends and many of our active duty VFA-25 shipmates at this great event. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to call or email me at the contacts below.

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

By: Chuck Webster

Since the first of the year two new paid life members, ten members paid their annual membership dues. We received \$950 in gifts for the Educational Fund. We also received \$581 in gifts for the Harry Jones Award. To date, 30 June 13, we show 31 members registered, with 23 guests for Fist '13. We paid the one Educational Grant for \$60.75. The balances are \$1,720.67 in the checking account and \$30,964.51 in the saving account.  
Chuck

## **FROM THE COCKPIT** By: LT Jason "JB" Ely Schedules Officer, Coffee Mess Officer, PAO

The Fists have been fortunate over the past few months to keep up our training tempo. During May, VFA-25 took four aircraft, eight pilots, and around 40 maintainers out to the USS CARL VINSON for a two week detachment. It was the first time the squadron has had an opportunity to take our new Rhinos out to sea and execute cyclic ops with the air wing. It also provided time for many of the junior pilots to work through the SFWT syllabus and gain experience with cyclic ops. Of note, LCDR Matthew Hopkins led an outstanding Large Force Exercise to earn his Strike Lead Qualification.

VFA-25 returned home to continue training from NAS Lemoore with units from around the world. Starting off with Air-to-Surface, Expeditionary Warfare Training Group, Pacific brought in their Joint Terminal Attack Controller students to Twentynine Palms, CA for the practical portion of the course. With the aid of VMGR-352 Raiders to provide front and backside tanking, Fist pilots received real world coordination with troops on the ground. To build further on Close Air Support training, VFA-25 worked with FAC(A) crews in AH-1W Super Cobras from HMLA-469, in the R-2507N Chocolate Mountains. The crews had the rare opportunity to sit down and have a face to face debrief between dissimilar type aircraft while learning the intricacies of the CAS mission. At the end of June and into the beginning of July, the Fists trekked to Holloman AFB, New Mexico with four aircraft to support the German Air Force Fighter Weapons School. Participating in syllabus events and a Large Force Exercise, VFA-25 provided REDAIR for the German PA-200 Tornados and F-22 Raptors from 7<sup>th</sup> Fighter Sqdrn. As a bonus, the squadron paired up with the 7<sup>th</sup> for a few 1v1 Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT) flights. We look forward to joining the GAF in September for the Mountain Roundup at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho.

In closing, the Fists would like to bid farewell and good luck to pilots LT Mike Jennings and LT Taylor Hesse on their future assignments. Mike has orders to the TOPGUN course followed by VFA-101 at Elgin AFB, Florida and Taylor is headed to VFA-122 here at NAS Lemoore. With their departure, we also received our two newest Fists, LT Tommy Kolwicz as our Training Officer from Strike Fighter Weapons School, Pacific and LT Colin Newton, fresh out of VFA-122.



### Have you paid your 2013 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)

## **SKIPPER'S CORNER**

Greetings Fists! VFA-25 is currently two weeks away from departing Carrier Air Wing Seventeen (CVW-17) to join team "Shogun" of CVW-9. We will leave behind VFA-113, VFA-22, and VFA-81 and be replaced by VFA-94 while joining VFA-14, VFA-41, and VFA-151 in CVW-9. The more frequent transitions from the FA-18C to the FA-18E has driven this scrambling of the traditional air wing compositions to which Lemoore Sailors have grown accustomed.

The quarter started off with VFA-25's final underway period aboard USS CARL VINSON. Though we only embarked half the squadron, the team excelled in underway operations thanks to the numerous cruise experienced Sailors still in ranks. One of the highlights of the detachment was the impressive action of AT1 James Morganti in spotting an improper catapult launch configuration on a Stinger aircraft in tension on an adjacent catapult. He managed to suspend the launch and prevent a potential mishap. As a result, AT1 Morganti was recognized by the Captain of CARL VINSON and CAG with numerous accolades and awards. The next day the fist team responded again to the hazards of the flight deck when a CARL VINSON Sailor severed his finger on the LSO platform. AZ3 Robert Valladares was working in the passageway below the LSO

platform due to our lack of squadron spaces and was the first on the scene to stabilize the wound. He and other Fists provided assistance to the injured Sailor while awaiting a medevac flight to Balboa.

In June the Fists traveled to Holloman Air Force Base in southern New Mexico for training with a USAF Raptor squadron and German Air Force Tornados. This detachment was a precursor to a three week exercise in October to Mountain Home AFB, Idaho for MOUNTAIN ROUNDUP 2013. The team enjoyed the unique opportunity to learn more about the joint capabilities of the Raptor and the Tornado while engaging in various large force exercises and air-to-air events. The experience at Holloman AFB also made the team aware that there are military air bases even more desolate than Fallon.

At the end of last month we received the unfortunate news that our UK exchange pilot, CDR(sel) Paul Tremelling, would be leaving us in July 2013. His recent promotion to O-5 combined with the unexpected vacancy of the F-35 program lead at the Ministry of Defense prompted this change of course. The Fists are sad to lose a valued member of the team, but look forward to his future success with the Royal Navy.

Looking ahead to the next quarter, the squadron is scheduled for its Maintenance Program Assist in late August followed by the Aviation Maintenance Inspection in early November. This will be the first opportunity to show the results of the squadron's post transition training and development of our core maintenance competencies. On the operational front, the schedule remains wide open. The current optempo continues to be a radical change to what has been the reality for most Sailors over the past twelve years. Despite this, the squadron continues to use the available time to broaden its mission capabilities and develop Fist of the Fleet personnel for future operational challenges.

All the best to the entire Fist team and I look forward seeing everyone at the reunion at Hook this year!

Very Respectfully,  
Fist One

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

By: Dennis Laack and Zip Rausa

MA-3 Joshua Tomchick is the latest recipient of a FOFA Education Grant in the amount of \$180.00.



Farewell to the Stingers and a long partnership!

USS Ranger Foundation  
May 5, 2013

What has happened? Over the past several years, the USS Ranger Foundation worked to save an important historical naval asset and bring it to the Pacific Northwest as the keystone of a community heritage project. Everyone involved was fully aware that making something this big happen would take a significant effort by all and would involve overcoming many challenges. Last summer, the USS Ranger Foundation submitted a Phase II Donation Application. As you know, the Navy decided not to proceed with the donation of ex-USS Ranger to the Foundation. The Navy has since issued a ship-demolition RFP that includes Ranger.

What do we do next? The Navy's decision may have appeared to be an end to the effort. We did not believe it should be. In response to the Navy's decision we reached out to our community and all those involved with the project to determine where to go from here. The USS Ranger Foundation Board of Directors, at its most recent meeting, decided to continue investigating the possibility of having one of the two decommissioned Tarawa-class ships transferred to donation hold when it is released from Reserve-B status. Our preference is ex-USS Tarawa (LHA-1), the lead ship of the class. The Foundation's intention at that time would be to prepare and submit a donation request based on the Fairview site which held so much promise as a future home for Ranger.

What would this mean for Rangemen? The Ranger herself, fourth in a long and distinguished line, may not be physically preserved. Her memory and accomplishments, and the memory and accomplishments of all who served in her, are not lost, and will not be lost. The intent of the Foundation is to provide a focal point for those memories in the form of a Ranger Ready Room, and similar ready rooms dedicated to other super-carriers that so ably carried the charge of preserving and protecting our nation during the second half of the Twentieth Century.

What did we accomplish? The efforts of the Foundation defined and focused a widely-felt need for such a ship-based memorial. A well-thought out proposal for a naval and community heritage site was developed. Widespread enthusiasm and support for such a project arose. Much effort was put into addressing the technical and logistical aspects attendant on a ship donation by the Navy. In the end, the challenges posed by the combination of ship size and barriers along the route to the inland site were not met to the satisfaction of the Navy. The purpose behind the urge to preserve Ranger remains, and remains valid. It goes beyond the desire simply to preserve a vessel, and to the desire to commemorate what makes a vessel worth preserving. That purpose is the desire to acknowledge and honor and carry forward what those who served in her and fought in her and her sister ships through the years cherished and believed in: The freedoms and principles that are the foundations of this country, the freedoms and principles that inspire those who serve and strive to preserve and protect them for all. There is substantial local and regional support for a community heritage project that includes an important historical naval asset as its centerpiece. The offer of land and riverfront as a site for the ship by Columbia-Edgewater, LLC was a significant show of support for the Ranger effort; that support still exists. Our many volunteers demonstrated a level of energy and enthusiasm that was an incalculable asset to the project; we believe that energy and enthusiasm still exists within the community. With the assistance of the staffs of Senators Wyden and Merkley and Representative Blumenauer of Oregon, we worked during the winter to identify other Navy ships that would be suitable as the centerpiece for a community and naval heritage center. We believe we have found such a possibility in the ships of the Tarawa class. Tarawa was the first of five ships in a new class of general-purpose amphibious assault ships, and combined in one ship type the functions previously performed by four different types: the amphibious assault ship (LPH), the amphibious transport dock (LPD), the amphibious cargo ship (LKA), and the dock landing ship (LSD). She was capable of landing elements of a Marine Corps battalion landing team and their supporting equipment by landing craft, by helicopters, or by a combination of both. USS Tarawa (LHA-1) is a United States Navy amphibious assault ship, the lead ship of her class, and the second ship to be named for the Battle of Tarawa during World War II. The first Tarawa was the USS Tarawa (CV-40). Tarawa was decommissioned 31 March 2009, at Naval Base San Diego. One ship of this class remains in active service today, USS Pelilieu (LHA-5). Two, ex-USS Saipan (LHA-2) and ex-USS Belleau Wood (LHA-3) have been scrapped. Two, ex-USS Tarawa (LHA-1) and ex-USS Nassau (LHA-4) are in Reserve-B status after being decommissioned. Tarawa is in Hawaii, and Nassau is in Texas.

Moving Forward. We take this opportunity to thank everyone for their contributions of time, treasure and commitment. We look forward to continued support from those who responded so positively to the idea of welcoming Ranger to our community. Such support is a large part of making such a significant project viable. We must now wait for the change in status, but will alert everyone when those changes happen. Until then, we continue to look for opportunities and will inform our supporters as they arise.

David Todd, Captain, USN (Ret)



## ***DID YOU KNOW? NAVY, MILITARY AND OTHER INFORMATION - FAC AIRCRAFT OF VIETNAM***

In 1962, the Army L-19 was re-designated the O-1 (Observation) Bird Dog and entered its second war in Vietnam. During the early 1960s, the Bird Dog was flown by South Vietnamese (ARVN-Army Republic Vietnam/SVAF South Vietnamese Air Force), U.S. Army, U.S. Marines and later by clandestine (Ravens) in Laos and Cambodia. During the Vietnam War the Bird Dog was used primarily for reconnaissance, target acquisition, artillery adjustment, radio relay, convoy escort and the forward air control of tactical aircraft (bombers).

Supplementing the O-1, then gradually replacing it, the USAF switch to the Cessna O-2 Skymaster, while the Marines took delivery of the OV-10 Bronco to replace the aging O-1. Both were faster, twin-engine aircraft but the Army kept with the Bird Dog throughout the war with up to eleven R.A.C. (Reconnaissance Airplane Companies) deployed to cover all of South Vietnam and even the DMZ and the southern edge of North Vietnam. Its more quiet, lower speed, tighter maneuverability, short runway ability and better visibility (even to the rear) kept it highly valued by ground units it supported and highly feared by enemy units it flew over. The last U.S. Army O-1 Bird Dog was officially retired in 1974.

During the course of the Vietnam War, 469 O-1 Bird Dogs were lost to all causes. The USAF lost 178, the USMC lost seven, and 284 were lost from the U.S. Army, South Vietnamese Forces, and clandestine operators. Three Bird Dogs were lost to enemy surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). Two Bird Dogs were loaned to the Australian Army's 161 Reconnaissance Flight operating out of Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy province. One was lost to ground fire in May 1968, killing 161's Officer Commanding. Another Bird Dog was built by this unit's maintenance crew, using aircraft sections salvaged from dumps around Vietnam. It was test flown and later smuggled back to Australia in pieces, contained in crates marked as "aircraft spares". This aircraft now resides in the Museum of Army Flying at the Army Aviation Center at Oakey Queensland.<sup>[2]</sup>

As the USAF phased out the O-1 in favor of the O-2, many O-1s in the United States were sold as surplus. During the 1970s and 1980s, Ector Aircraft remanufactured many as the Ector Mountaineer with their original powerplants, and as the Ector Super Mountaineer with the Lycoming O-540-A4B5. In the 1970s, the O-2 Skymaster and North American OV-10 Bronco replaced the O-1 in front-line USAF service.

### General characteristics O-1 Bird Dog

- Crew: 1
- Length: 25 ft 9 in (7.85 m) • Wingspan: 36 ft 0 in (10.97 m) • Height: 7ft 3½ in (2.22 m)
- Wing area: 174 ft<sup>2</sup> (16.16 m<sup>2</sup>) • Empty weight: 1,614 lb (732 kg)
- Max. takeoff weight: 2,400 lb (1089 kg) • Powerplant: 1 × Continental O-470-11 flat six piston, 213 hp (159 kw)

### Performance

- Maximum speed: 130 mph (209 km/h) • Range: 530 miles (853 km) • Service ceiling: 20,300 ft (6,200 m)
- Rate of climb: 1,040 ft/min (317 m/min)



### General characteristics O-2 Skymaster

- Crew: 2 - pilot and observer
- Length: 29.75 ft (9.07 m) • Wingspan: 38.17 ft (11.63 m) • Height: 9.17 ft (2.79 m)
- Wing area: 202.5 ft<sup>2</sup> (18.8 m<sup>2</sup>) • Empty weight: 2,848 lb (1,292 kg) • Loaded weight: 5,400 lb (2,448 kg)
- Powerplant: 2 × Continental IO-360C six-cylinder flat engines, 210 hp (157 kW) each

### Performance

- Maximum speed: 200 mph (322 km/h) • Range: 1,325 mi (2,132 km) combat • Service ceiling: 18,000 ft (5,490 m)
- Rate of climb: 1,180 ft/min (6 m/s)

## **FISTORY - LANG VEI: YANKEE STATION**

Yankee Station was a point in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of Vietnam used by US Navy aircraft carriers of TF 77 to launch strikes during the war. It was located about 190 km due east of Dong Hoi, at 17° 30' N and 108° 30' E. While its official designation was "Point Yankee," it was universally referred to as Yankee Station. Carriers conducting air ops at Yankee Station were said to be "on the line" and statistical summaries were based on days on the line.

During the two periods of sustained air operations against North Vietnam (3/2/65-10/31/68 and 3/30/72-12/29/72) there were normally three carriers on the line, each conducting air operations for 12 hours on/12 hours off. One carrier would operate from noon to midnight, another from midnight to noon, and one during daylight hours, which gave 24-hour coverage plus additional effort during daylight hours, when sorties were most effective.

The first aircraft carrier at Yankee Station was KITTY HAWK (CVA-63) which was ordered there in 4/64 for the Yankee Team missions. KITTY HAWK was joined by TICONDEROGA (CVA-14) in May and CONSTELLATION (CVA-64) in June, two months prior to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

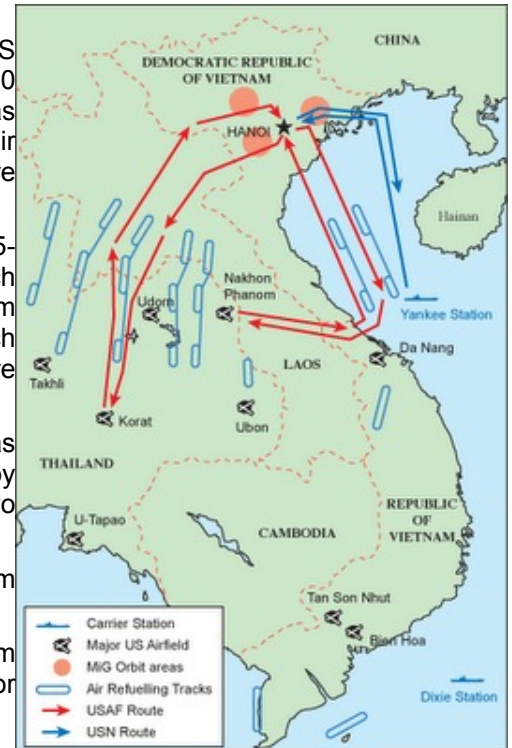
TICONDEROGA and CONSTELLATION launched the first bombing missions from Yankee Station on 8/5/64.

A corresponding Dixie Station in the South China Sea off the Mekong Delta at 130 km due southeast of Cam Ranh Bay, at 11° N and 110° E was a single carrier point for conducting strikes within South Vietnam from 5/15/65 - 8/3/66.

In December of 1967 three carriers were on the line: RANGER (CVA-61) arrived 12/3, KITTY HAWK on 12/19 and CORAL SEA (CVA-43) on 12/21 having just returned from a brief R&R in Subic Bay. Air operations then fell in to a measured tempo of day and night activities in North Vietnam ranging from strikes in and around Hanoi and Haiphong to as far south as the area around the DMZ. Hard targets such as bridges were repeatedly hit while the on-going interdiction campaign against these and troop concentrations and vehicles convoys continued without letup. The direct threats to the attack aircraft were comprised of AAA and small arms fire as the A-1 drivers generally were at altitudes below that which the numerous SAM sites would be effective. A strike package of from 2 to 4 aircraft was generally used, the more potent Alpha Strike missions, which could comprise an entire carrier air wing, were usually reserved for more lucrative targets where the SAM and Triple-A threat was expected to be especially serious.

During the last week of December VA-25 pilots were successful in multiple rescue operations taking credit for locating and protecting 4 downed airmen. During this period they also recorded 5 trucks destroyed, 3 damaged; 23 Water Borne Logistics Craft destroyed, 62 damaged; 6 roads cut, 1 radar site eliminated; 1 military structure destroyed, 1 damaged and 1 bunker damaged. During the '67 line period VA-25 did not lose a single aircraft to enemy activity in more than 5 months of actual combat time in-country.

On January 3rd, 1968 the ENTERPRISE (CVAN-65) arrived on station adding her weight to the on-going campaign while CORAL SEA again prepared to depart for another brief rest period, returning Jan 16. Unknown to the military commanders at MACV the NVA had slowly been building their forces north of the DMZ while VC units infiltrated the south, entering not only the major cities but in many rural government centers as they prepared to launch an all-out offensive. That the command structure of MACV was caught so unaware speaks not only to the lack of a credible intelligence network but also to the abilities of the North to move vast amounts of men and material unnoticed down the Ho Chi Minh trail to staging areas throughout South Vietnam.



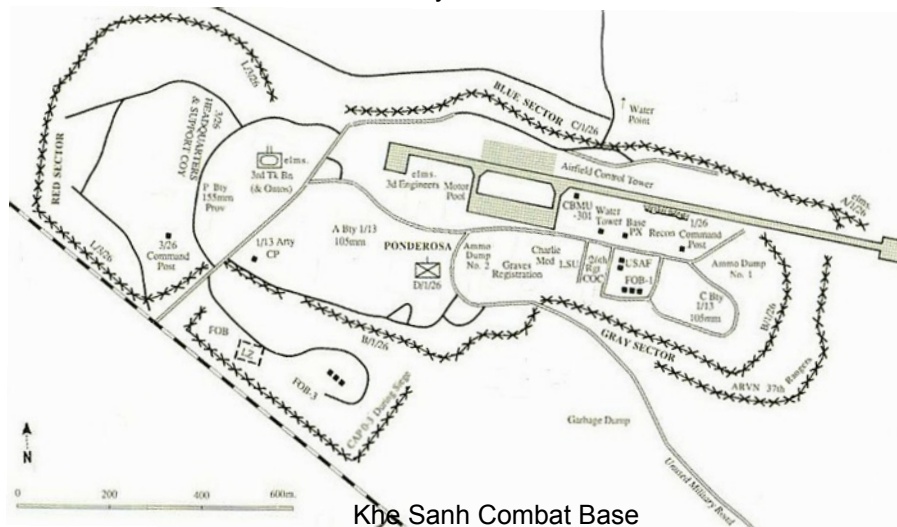
The American command in Saigon initially believed that combat operations around the Khe Sanh Combat Base during the summer of 1967 were just part of a series of minor North Vietnamese offensives in the border regions. That appraisal was altered when it was discovered that the NVA were moving major forces into the area during the fall and winter. A build-up of Marine forces took place and actions around Khe Sanh commenced when the Marine base was isolated.

Throughout the first half of January during the monsoon season strikes continued to be carried out by the carrier air wings with concrete results against all targets, the A-6A Intruders being exceptionally successful in the near-zero visibility.

## **FISTORY - LANG VEI: YANKEE STATION**

Time and again the SPADs were called in to provide on-site support during RESCAP missions due not only to the heavy ordinance loads they carried but also for their ability to linger in the area far longer than any fast-mover. On Jan 20 the NVA launched an attack on the Khe Sanh Combat Base. On the 21st LCDR Rausa and ENS Ramsey were on a mission to provide cover for a recon unit near Laos when OPERATION NIAGARA II was launched and the shit hit the fan. Events would now rapidly spiral in to an out of control situation as elements of 3rd Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, came under heavy mortar, rocket and artillery fire at the base. In the initial volley, both of the base ammunition dumps were hit by incoming artillery destroying most of the Marines' ordnance supply. The bombardment was constant, making resupply life-risking. The 5,000 Marines had 77 arduous days of hell ahead of them. The defense of the base was officially code-named OPERATION SCOTLAND.

Also on Jan 21 the village at Khe Sanh was overrun by NVA forces cutting the roads west. The situation for naval forces became more intense when on Jan 23 the USS Pueblo was seized by the North Koreans while operating in international waters. ENTERPRISE was immediately ordered north to observe the situation and would not return to Yankee Station until Feb 22. VA-25 commenced operations in earnest on Jan 25 striking targets in the Khe Sanh area, and on the 26th hit the Laotian outpost of Bane Houei Sane which had just been overrun. That same day a further 17 sorties were launched striking a variety of NVA targets destroying several outposts and villages. There would be no let up and on the 27th a further 29 buildings were hit in and around the infested camp.



USS Pueblo AGER-2

On Jan 26 TICONDEROGA arrived and the RANGER was released to steam north to support ENTERPRISE then operating in the Sea of Japan. She would not return to the line until Mar 19. Thus, at a critical time during the initial stages of the siege of Khe Sanh US Naval forces could have been deprived of 33% of their nominal strike capabilities. On the 29th CORAL SEA was ordered to remain on station for at least an additional 10 days to support operations. In the end she stayed for 20 days and then was moved north near Korea. In support of SCOTLAND VA-25 launched missions during the first week of February striking targets in and around the border near Laos. During this period aircraft from the other carriers continued to apply pressure in the north hitting rail and marshalling yards, convoys and troop concentrations. The defenses were also becoming more intense as the NVA forces were in the final stages of preparation for their upcoming offensive and on Jan 30 launched the Tet attacks.

As the scope of the Tet offensive became more apparent to a stunned military command structure, US Forces and their ARVN allies, caught off-guard, reeled, regrouped and stiffened. The fire-fights in Saigon, the assault on the ancient capitol city of Hue and the on-going misery at Khe Sanh became the new faces of the war in Vietnam. A turning point had been reached; one from which US policy in South East Asia would not recover. As the media began to send their reports and video back to the States an awakening was occurring in the conscience of the American people; one that would, by the end of the year, consume them.

February 7th, 1968 approximately 0615:

Canasta Flight, Mustang. Vector Two-Six-Six at Five Thousand. Contact Covey Six-Eight-Eight West-South-West of Khe Sanh on Fox Mike Two-Two.

Mustang, Canasta Roger. Copy Two-Six-Six at Five, Covey Six-Eight-Eight on Fox Mike Two-Two.

References

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Khe\\_Sanh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Khe_Sanh) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS\\_Pueblo\\_\(AGER-2\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Pueblo_(AGER-2))

<http://www.fisthistory.org/Viet-A1.pdf> <http://marinesmagazine.dodlive.mil/2011/04/13/battle-of-khe-sanh/>

<http://worldhistoryproject.org/1968/1/21/operation-niagara-ii-is-launched> For the FAC aircraft article see Wikipedia

## **NEXT TIME IN FISTORY - LANG VEI: THE SOUND OF DEMONS**