



Fist of the Fleet Association

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

NEWSLETTER

July 2014

Preserving the Past Providing for Today
Promoting the Future

SUMMER EDITION

Reality Bites!

The week of June 9th I called my boss and told him I needed to burn a vacation day so I would take off Friday the 13th. On the 12th when speaking with a client we both were looking forward to a long weekend as we agreed that while we were neither superstitious nor stupid it was better to be off that day. Michelle wanted to go antiquing up in Columbus so she stayed home as well. That morning, walking around barefooted as I usually do, I stepped down in to the garage carrying out the trash. For some reason I stumbled and my left arch hit the edge of the step at the wrong angle. The pain lanced up to my knee and I let out a sailor's blue streak. Limping back in, I called my doctor. "I'm booked, go to urgent care" was his response. Four hours later the x-ray came back showing a clean break in some bone fragments from an undetermined previous injury. "You probably tore some ligaments, see a podiatrist." Okay. Monday the podiatrist said "It's probably the tendon, have an ultrasound." Fine. A week later after 3 hours; two ultrasound techs and 2 doctors the diagnosis is the known fracture, tears in the peroneus longus tendon and swelling and fluid build-up from a massive ankle sprain and advanced, chronic tendonitis. Treatment? Until mid-August: ice 3 times per day, a handful of pills 2 times per day and I am wearing a massive Star Wars Storm-trooper boot. So, is there a naval moral to all of this? Of course. As we were all told and learned through hard experience it is not the unforeseen tragedy that we need look out for. *It is the familiarity of routine that breeds complacency that will lead to accidents.* Something as ordinary as taking out the garbage can have dramatic consequences. It's also true that most accidents occur in the home but come on, a busted-up foot? Really? I've been telling myself that they were left over from some under-lying and unknown injury in there from my baseball days playing behind the plate but who really knows. Hell, almost every ache, pain and problem I have is left over from baseball. And as for Friday the 13th? Well, I'm still not superstitious but as my wife so astutely observed: "That was a damn stupid thing to do!"

CALL TO ACTION!

The FOFA Board of Directors reminds *everyone* to submit their ideas and requests for the location of the FIST '15 East Coast reunion site *immediate* to the Board! If no reasonable ideas are submitted I will remind you now that the DEFAULT LOCATION is Pensacola, FL. There have only been a very few ideas floated around but all of them pertain to selecting another hotel within the greater Pensacola area. This is an **urgent action item** that requires your immediate attention. Please reach out to your Board Members (see President's Message) with any suggestions you might have as the site selection must be finalized soon so the advanced planning may begin. If we go to Pensacola it will be during the weekend of the Blues Homecoming in mid-November, however if an alternate site is selected the reunion could be pushed up to late summer or early autumn. While there is nothing *wrong* with the Pensacola Hilton we have the chance to avoid the "been there, done that" syndrome that could drive attendance down. So, Speak Up Sailor! All ideas will be entertained, nothing is out of reach, everything is possible. My vote is for Dayton, Ohio due to the presence of their quality museums, conference centers and hotel capacities. It's up to us; Norfolk, JAX, Charleston, Dayton or the same old, same old. Where ever it is, see you there.



www.fistoffthefleet.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.

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President's Message

I need to inform the membership of a temporary unfortunate circumstance that our Association faces. I discovered while checking our tax-exempt status with the IRS this past May that our exemption was revoked in May of 2010. This was due to a change in IRS rules in 2006. Previous to this we were not required to file a return or report due to the Association's limited assets. The rule change required filing a simple online report for each year. After missing three consecutive years automatic revocation removed our tax-exempt status. I know that is a shocker, but I assure you we are not alone based on my discussions with IRS personnel. The good news is that there is a procedure, though lengthy and detailed, that we are currently underway with that should reinstate our tax exempt status retroactively all the way back to 2006 when the rule changed. It involves submitting 990EZ tax returns for all our past years, which go back to 2004 and additional supporting documents. Chuck Webster, FOFA Treasurer and myself are working to get all the necessary information compiled and ready for submission. We will keep you informed when we receive notification from IRS of their determination and hopefully our reinstatement of tax-exempt status. This could take several months, so please be patient. In the interim I am requesting that you hold all contributions, including dues, until we are reinstated. I assure you that your Association is in solid financial condition. We can handle any educational grant requests, the next Harry Jones Award and normal operating expenses for the newsletter, directory and website.

My understanding regarding your past personal tax deductions for FOFA is that once we receive retroactive reinstatement then there is no effect. After reinstatement and based on the size of our organization and it's limited total assets, we will be able to annually file a simple report online early each year which meets all of the IRS requirements. Needless to say this has been a learning experience with a few sleepless nights. I am confident that we can rectify this situation and continue the good work of FOFA. Our relationship with our active duty squadron and support from their leadership remains very strong as we continue to assist their educational pursuits and recognize exemplary service to our country. Since it is difficult to cover all the particulars of this situation in this short article, please feel free to contact me with any further questions. My contact info is listed under the Officers in this issue.

As to the venue for the Fist 15 Reunion, it is currently undecided. I hope to have our selection finalized by early fall. Your input is welcomed as well as any assistance on the ground in the selected city. We will inform the membership via email and the next online newsletter. On that note please update your contact info if it has changed recently and forward to Nick Johnson, FOFA Secretary or myself.

Nominations are open for the offices of Vice President, Treasurer and Public Relations to begin serving three year terms 1/1/15. I can forward a nomination form to any interested voting member and we will also have it placed on our FOFA website in the near future. Please consider stepping up to help lead this great organization.

Gary "Dome" Kerans

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Blue Angels Tour Dates

Jul 05/06 Traverse City MI	12 Pensacola FL
19/20 Offutt AFB NE	26/27 St. George UT
Aug 02/03 Seattle WA	16/17 Chicago IL
23/24 Duluth MN 301/31	Selfridge ANGB MI
Sep 06/07 Cleveland OH	13/14 Baltimore MD
20/21 NAS Oceana VA	27/28 MCB Hawaii HI

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

By: Chuck "Pooh" Webster

I am pleased to report that the financial condition for the FOFA during 2014 has stayed solid. We have a present balance of \$27,116.25 in our Navy Federal accounts. Annual membership payments are down this year but we did pick up a new life member. Only five annual members have paid their yearly dues.

VFA-25 personnel have received \$818.14 in educational grants. The Association makes a strong commitment to the squadron for the Educational Grant Program which we take very serious and welcome grant award applications from the squadron.

The FOFA made a gift to the NAS Lemoore Aviation Memorial Association for \$1000.00 and the Spad Drivers made another gift of \$2000.00 that was given in their name as members of VA-25 during those war years.

FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM

By: Dennis Laack and Zip Rausa

Since the last newsletter, the Association has received two additional requests for educational grants from AT-1 Toby Smith. His first grant was reported in our spring newsletter. The two most recent grants were for two business courses and two management courses. He is working on his bachelor's degree in Technical Business Management. He is taking courses from DeVry University.

All three grants were in the amount of \$160 which covers the cost of electronic books for two courses. The books are provided by DeVry at a standard cost of \$80 per course.



AT-1 Toby Smith



AM-2 Rodriguez Q1 Grant Recipient

FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION OTHER NEWS



In Search of the Toilet Bomb

Zip Rausa is trying to locate the original film footage (believed to be 16 mm) of the delivery of the infamous VA-25 "Toilet Bomb" aboard NE 572 from USS Midway in October 1965. If you have any knowledge regarding the location of this film, current or past, please contact Zip at his email goldwings@verizon.net, 703 281-2324 or cell: 703 887-6617.

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

SKIPPER'S CORNER

I am happy to report that the Fist of the Fleet has not taken its foot off of the gas pedal since the last newsletter. While we have not seen work up or deployment activity in over two years now, the squadron has participated in 15 detachments since January of 2013. It is truly impressive to see the level of talent that this squadron possesses, from Airman to Department Head.

During the last quarter, the squadron spent two weeks in Key West on a dedicated air to air training detachment. The range space and support facilities in Key West are about as good as they come. While there, we saw many of our LTs achieve and work towards advanced qualifications. The liberty isn't so bad either. I assure you, the liberty piece had no factor in our desire to go there. We returned to Lemoore and finally got a few weeks to catch our breath before heading to God's Country, aka Fallon, for a week in June. We were asked to support NSAWC in achieving instructor qualifications in the form of providing jets and pilots to fly in Large Force Strikes. It was excellent exposure for many of our pilots as well as maintainers that had little or no experience working in and around Fallon. During that week of fairly heavy flying, Team FIST knocked it out of the park with

a 100% sortie completion rate. The quality of maintenance provided by FIST Sailors is the best I've seen in my entire career.

As I type this update, I'm sitting back in Fallon having landed less than an hour ago. We will be participating in a two week readiness detachment with CVW-9. If all goes well, we will leave here having designated three new combat section leads for team FIST. On the training horizon, we'll be looking at some CQ in the coming months as well as another potential trip to Key West later in the fall.

I hope this note finds everyone well. I cannot express my gratitude enough to all of the Fist of the Fleet Association members. Your support of this squadron is first rate, and I'm thrilled to be a part of it. If anyone is planning on vacationing in the beautiful, temperate, and touristy destination that is California's Central Valley, do not hesitate to look us up.

Very Respectfully,
Fist One

FROM THE COCKPIT By: LT Justin "Neuman" Reece

The Fist of the Fleet continues to sharpen their sword in a highly dynamic and productive training environment. Since March 2014, we completed a very successful Key West air-to-air detachment, two Fallon air-to-surface detachments, and qualified numerous squadron pilots in advanced Strike Fighter Weapons and Tactics (SFWT).

Although having just returned from an air-to-air missile shoot in Tyndall AFB, the squadron went on the road mid-April with six aircraft to NAS Key West for a two week advanced air-to-air employment detachment. As many of our FOFA followers can attest, Key West is a fantastic operating area with great weather, professional bandit support, and some of the best liberty imaginable! VFC-111 and ATAC provided us with REDAIR support simulating a host of threat aircraft and tactics. Their professionalism enabled us to train to the most advanced threats around the world - safely and efficiently. When not in the air, the entire squadron enjoyed all that Key West had to offer. Whether deep sea fishing, snorkeling, relaxing on the beach, or the "Duval Crawl," our Sailors had plenty of time to relax and enjoy.

Upon returning to Lemoore, the squadron shifted their training focus to air-to-surface employment and tactics. For six weeks, our day-to-day flight schedule executed close air support (CAS), strike coordination and reconnaissance (SCAR), day and night strafe, as well as a sortie "surge" day to exercise our squadron's ability to maximize productivity over the course of a 12 hour fly window. The "surge" day was an overwhelming success with near flawless execution from ALL hands.

Additionally, the squadron participated in joint exercises organized by Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific (EWTGPAC). These exercises included a combination of live, inert and simulated ordnance to qualify Sailors and Marines as Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC) and provide us with opportunities to practice CAS tactics, techniques, and procedures as well as big wing tanking on both the Marine KC-130J and Omega 707.

By June, the squadron was ready for a one week detachment supporting the "HAVOC" Growler Tactics Instructor (GTI) course hosted by Airborne Electronic Attack Weapons School (N10). The pilots conducted some unit level training, but mostly played significant strike and fighter roles in both day and night large force strikes (LFS). This exercise provided a unique training opportunity for prospective E/A-18 GTI instructors to practice LFS execution essential to the HAVOC training syllabus. Additionally, many of VFA-25's JO pilots had not operated out of Fallon making this training invaluable in preparation for our July CVW-9 Fallon detachment.

As is standard practice in Naval Aviation, we periodically bid farewell to great pilots, excellent ground officers, and outstanding Sailors. "Once a Fist, always a Fist" we like to say. Each accomplished much during their typical three year tour and will no doubt go on to have a significant impact in their follow on assignments. Those that have departed include LT Kirk "Slab" Jackson to VFA-122 as an Instructor Pilot and LCDR Dennis "Roscoe" Rippy to VX-31 in NAF China Lake as the Operations Officer.

No person can truly be replaced, but as people leave the squadron we gain others bringing new talents, experience, and better jokes to the Ready Room. Joining the Fist of the Fleet in July are LCDR Paolo 'Schwarma' Singh from VFA-22 where he served as their Pilot Training Officer and LTJG Matthew 'FNG' Matlock from VFA-106 where he enjoyed flying without an associated ground job. Additionally, we have a new Intelligence Officer in ENS Fabian Varela, a 16-year Marine Corps veteran, as well as countless maintenance professionals from across the Navy.



FIST PICS



Section RTB from Superior Valley Training Complex



LT Sean "Butterbean" Blackman's first flight as a qualified section lead



Above: LT Dennis "Roscoe" Rippy's last flight in VFA-25

Right:: LT Kirk "Slab" Jackson's last flight in VFA-25

Courtesy: LT Reece VFA-25 PAO



FISTORY - LANG VEI: CONCLUSION

1968 would see the aviators of VA-25 transition to the training syllabus with VA-122 at NAS Lemoore for the new LTV A-7 Corsair II; an aircraft so significantly different from their beloved Skyraiders as night is from day. On 11 April '68 Ltjg Ted Hill flew the Navy's last Skyraider to the Pensacola Naval Air Museum. For the rest of the year while VA-25 existed only on paper her future pilots honed their skills on the new aircraft at MCAS Yuma and NAS Fallon and then completed their carrier qualifications aboard USS Kitty Hawk (CVA-63). The new nose launch bar on the A-7 replaced the old "bit and bridle" gear and was a great asset in speeding up the launch cycle. Finally taking possession of their new A-7B aircraft the squadron deployed with Carrier Air Group 16 to Vietnam onboard USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14) on 1 Feb '69.



OFFICERS OF VA-25 FRONT ROW—LTJG Pellot, LCDR McDermott, LTJG Hagen LCDR Skelton, CDR Church Jr., LCDR Smith, LTJG Nichols, LTJG Dunn. SECOND ROW—LT McGee, LTJG Thom, ENS Ramsey, LT Buchberger, LCDR Ritzmann, LCDR Bolt, LTJG Stone, LCDR Rausa, LTJG Marcus, LTJG Gardiner, LCDR Moser, ENS Hill Jr.



The Last SPAD



VA-25 A-7B Corsair II



Corsairs aboard the "Tico" 1968



Ticonderoga, lead ship of her class, refuels off the coast of Vietnam. With a length of 888 ft and a flight deck of only 147 ft at it's widest point these ships were nevertheless instrumental in helping the Navy transition to the Jet Age.

FISTORY - LANG VEI: CONCLUSION

After a 5-month deployment the Fist of the Fleet returned home to begin an immediate transition to the new A-7E. Incorporating the very latest in technological advancements she was the first truly “all digital” aircraft in the Naval Aviation inventories and helped pave the way for the later “fly by wire” aircraft. Affectionately (or obnoxiously) referred to as the SLUF VA-25 would demonstrate her war-fighting capabilities as a solid and stable weapons platform, deploying their moderate weapons loads with pin-point and devastating accuracy during their final war cruise to Vietnam in 1972 under the leadership of the legendary Ed Greathouse. By then VA-25 had moved to CAG 2 on board USS Ranger (CVA/CV-61) with her sister squadron, VA-113 “Stingers”, an air group and carrier relationship that would last for 10 years.

So much as been written about the air and land campaigns in Vietnam that it would seem like there is nothing left to say, no story untold. The problems and issues, the Rules of Engagement, the tactics and weapons all came under critical review in the post-war years. America vowed to remember and never repeat the mistakes that were made. Sadly, that has not been the case. Although there have been very rewarding high points in the intervening years (Grenada, Panama, Desert Shield/Desert Storm) the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan suddenly became a sideshow theater of operations when the US military was suddenly taken “*off mission*” for a second, and ill-advised intervention in to Iraq.* Whatever you may think about Saddam Hussein Iraq was, at that time, a stable country with running water, working power plants and a solid infrastructure. Now, descending into sectarian violence and “ethnic cleansing” we will be feeling the ramifications of this for many years to come.* At the forefront of the fight will be the carriers of the United States and their attendant Air Groups and where goes Naval Aviation so goes the Fist of the Fleet. Eventually it will be seen that nothing less than full military might will be the only course open to us, and to any nation wishing to intervene in keeping these conflicts from spreading to other countries in the Middle East and Asian sub-continent. As ISIS keeps pushing to spread their extremist views of Islam and re-establish the old Ottoman Empire our eyes must not only be vigilant in looking overseas, but here at home as well. The oceans no longer represent an impassable barrier. Technology can only do so much to impede an enemy’s progress. It cannot, by itself, defeat him.

The events at Lang Vei only solidified what many people have known since the early days of carrier aviation; that Naval Aviators are a special breed. Battered, bloodied and bruised, but never knocked down they know the fight’s the thing. No other pilots come close to their level of skill and determination; their commitments to each other and their cause, whatever events dictate what that might be. They fly where angels fear to tread, to the mouth of hell if need be to fulfill their missions. Many of those missions have become the stuff of legend, many of their pilots true heroes. They are ever ready to go screaming off the decks of their carriers to face whatever awaits them over the battlefronts with faith in themselves, and faith in their aircraft. And as at Lang Vei they will always be ready to prove that nothing is impractical, nothing is improbable and *nothing* is impossible.

* Author’s opinion



Commemorative Air Force Skyraider



127002 Michele Gineste and Maurice Etchetto in Le Havre, France

FISTORY - LANG VEI: CONCLUSION

Much has been written about the Skyraider, about the aircraft and the men who flew her. But, what then, is her legacy? Until the A-10 entered service in 1977 there was no aircraft in any inventory that could perform the CAS or RESCAP missions other than helicopters. The A-10's CAS design concept was proven successful in the first Gulf War in 1991 and she has continued to serve in CAS and RESCAP capacities since then. The CAS concept itself was developed by the Navy and Marines in the Pacific Campaigns of WWII alongside the development of the needs for the FACs. Re-proven during the Korean War the CAS/FAC and RESCAP missions are today a viable and necessary component of our war-fighting strategies. The CAS mission itself is generally flown by assault helicopters and with inter-service training more soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen are capable of fulfilling the ground-based FAC mission. The RESCAP mission can be performed by a wide variety of aircraft but generally only helicopters or the A-10s are able to provide true CAS support with their ability to fly low and slow over the target areas. This is the true legacy of the Skyraider. Designed as an attack aircraft she found her calling down at altitudes few jets would find comfortable operating at. Considered by many to be too old and too slow she nevertheless was a redoubtable warrior who would remain on station long after the fast-movers had gone home. For many years after the retirement of the Navy Skyraiders the Air Force continued to use this aircraft for RESCAP, and the term "Sandy" entered the lexicon of war history. And right up to the end of the Vietnam War in April 1975 VNAF Skyraiders were still in action although there are many who, to this day, discount those actions and discredit those pilots.

Of the 3180 Skyraiders built only 19 remain air-worthy. Spread across the world they are in the hands of private collectors or museums, but few of these are ever seen operating at air shows. There are a further 23 on display and 5 in storage.

They say that machines have no soul, that they are only so much metal and fluid, paint and wires, rubber and other materials. But everyone in aviation knows that no two aircraft of the same type are ever alike, each has its own personality and idiosyncrasies and each must be treated differently by her pilot. Created by man, however, they are infused with the blood, sweat and tears of their pilots and the men who worked so hard to maintain them and bring them to life when called for. As an individual then; each does have its own soul.

Aircraft serial number 135300, MODEX 405 rests at the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, Florida. A veteran of VA-25 "Fist of the Fleet" she last saw combat in 1968 and during the attacks on Lang Vei is recorded to have flown 4 strike missions that day. She sleeps now, possibly dreaming of days past, and wondering if at some time in the future she may be rolled out again; to be spruced up and dialed in, to have an intrepid young man or a veteran "stick and rudder man" strap himself in, and again run thundering down the runway, to take to the skies that are her home; and just possibly that pilot will crack open her throttle and take her down in the weeds at 285 kt. and 200 ft. above the ground before lifting her nose and pulling up in to a steep, climbing turn, a reminder of the days of her youth, when courage and danger flew hand-in hand in the airs above the battlefields. Once again, a breathing, graceful creature; whose memory, honor and glory can never die.

There is only one rule in war; one must win (Gen Vo Nguyen Giap, 1975) (b 1911-d 10/4/13)

References and Resources

There was a massive selection of resources that were utilized to present the actions of Zip Rausa and VA-25 during the attacks on the NVA at Lang Vei. I owe a debt of gratitude to Toby Rushforth for providing me with his notes that he uses in his presentations, Bob Hagen for his recollections and a copy of the '09 Lang Vei reunion DVD, VFA-25 Skipper Ryan "Tsu" Smith for the package of documents he sent me which included a copy of Zip's hand written after-action notes, Bruce Marcus for copies of the VA-25 After Action Reports of Feb 7 '68, Jay Stone for his memory and all the others members of the squadron who served during the Vietnam War and to Zip Rausa for his tenacity and courage, his commitment and dedication and above all his humanity and humility. Along with all the resources as listed in the previous Newsletter Editions, the following were used specifically for the events of Feb 7/8:

Night of the Silver Stars; Phillips, 1997 NIP

The A-1 Skyraider in Vietnam; Mutza, 2003 Schiffer

US Navy A-1 Skyraider Units of the Vietnam War; Burgess/Rausa, 2009 Osprey

Flying Dragons The South Vietnamese Air Force; Mikesh, 2005 Schiffer

The Battle of Lang Vei by John A. Crash: www.history.army.mil/books/Vietnam/7-ff/Ch6.htm

Team Sergeant; Craig, 1998 Ivy Books

Bury Us Upside Down; Newman/Shepperd, 2006 Presidio

www.fistory.org <http://www.langvei.com/air-support.php> <http://langvei.com/toby-the-battle.php>

<http://vfa-25.ahf.nmci.navy.mil/Main.htm> <http://www.vfa25.navy.mil/Main.htm> www.thespecialforce.com

For understanding FAC operations and communications:

Naked in Da Nang; Jackson/Dixon-Engel, 2004 Zenith

100 Feet Over Hell; Hooper, 2009 Zenith

NEXT TIME IN FISTORY - KOREA: PERILOUS DAYS