



Fist of the Fleet Association

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

NEWSLETTER

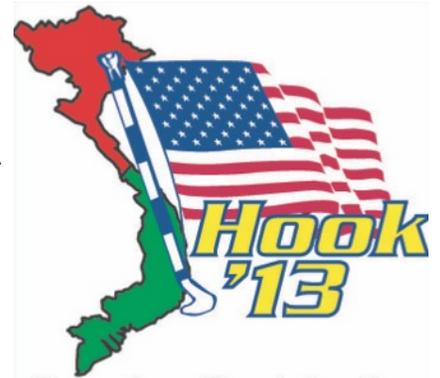
October 2013

Preserving the Past Providing for Today
Promoting the Future

AUTUMN EDITION

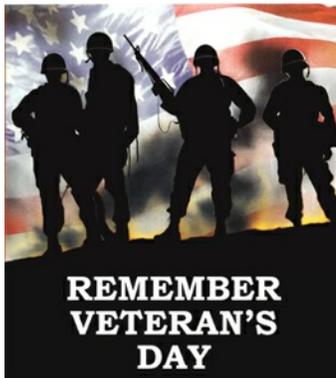
By: Jerry "Ricochet" Fritze

This year the Fist of the Fleet Association was proud to hold our Biannual reunion in Reno, Nevada to help celebrate and honor the 40th anniversary of the return of the POW's from Vietnam. We were especially excited to have 18 active duty squadron members in attendance, and with the addition of some new members from the Corsair squadrons it made for a memorable once-in-a-lifetime event. FOFA wrapped up all of it's business late Thursday night and we were cut loose to enjoy ourselves for the next 2 days. Nothing like a little weekend liberty in Reno! Besides the Tailhook events in the hotel there was plenty offered outside of the event. Winery tours, Lake Cruises, Hot Air Balloon Races, the Reno Air Races and other local attractions kept everybody hopping the entire time. I spent Thursday prior to our functions at the contractor exhibition collecting info on aircraft, weapons, systems and other new technologies and really enjoyed busting on the Osprey rep trying to get him to convince me that his system is a better platform than the C-2, which has a higher cubic foot limit.. In case you don't know the Osprey cannot carry a fully configured engine ready to install out of the box. So there will be either a new RFI or a competition to see which aircraft will be the COD of the future. Remember: just because a new technology exists it does not follow you need to use it. There were also several discussion panels hosted each day so there was plenty to choose from to occupy your time and in the event you just needed some serious "down" time there was the casino floor where I caught a former Fistie at one of the tables with a couple of VFA-22 Redcocks. That man has no shame. This year was also the first General Meeting of the new A-7 Association and the word has gone out: they are seriously searching for former enlisted to join.



The Association General Meeting included the inaugural presentation of the Harry Jones Memorial Award for Excellence to Andy "PD" Peterson, an Education Grant Award to Joshua Berna (not present) and the election of Al Gorthy as a new Board Member-At-Large. All-in-all it was a smooth couple of days even if I was up 38 hours before I had to crash and burn. It's not too early to begin the discussion for Fist '15, some locales being floated are Dayton OH, JAX, Newport News and Charleston SC.

All reunions are good, this one was very special. Our sincere thanks to the Hook and Nugget staffs for their efforts helping to make this another very memorable Fist Reunion.



November 11th is set aside as Veteran's Day. Please take a moment to offer a thought to all of those who have served and please remember that *all* veterans are wounded. Some of us carry small scars, often forgotten, that are the true reminders of our service, while others are still lost in the alleys of society, half seen and never spoken of. It is never too late to acknowledge them, to shake their hand, or to shed a tear in fellowship.

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.

www.fistofthefleet.org

President's Message

Fist 13 is now behind us and by all accounts it was a great success. Not only did we have a strong presence of our membership, but a tremendous showing by our current VFA-25 shipmates. The Nugget and Hook 13 proved to be excellent venues for our reunion with a variety of events to choose from and comfortable surroundings for our dinner/meeting and hospitality suite. Thank you again to all who set aside the time and expense to attend Fist 13.

At our dinner Thursday evening we enjoyed a presentation from Skipper Ryan Smith on squadron activities this past year as they completed their transition to the Super Hornet FA-18 E. After the exceptionally high tempo of frequent deployments in the previous four years, the squadron will remain shore based in Lemoore for an extended timeframe. This presents its own challenges relative to operational readiness and shipboard proficiency. The squadron and the Navy in general are dealing with cutbacks from our current leadership in Washington. They are continually pressing to maintain the necessary high level of readiness by participating in a variety of detachments and inter-service training events. I think we were all left confident and proud of the current squadron leadership and cadre of naval aviators and sailors who are carrying on the traditions and history of the Fist of the Fleet.

We had two presentations for the squadron at this year's reunion. The first was a second Educational Grant to AOAN Joshua Berna for \$536.41 covering his latest book expenses. It is particularly noteworthy that he is progressing quickly towards completion of his Associates degree. Congratulations Joshua.

The second award was our inaugural presentation of the LTJG Harry D. Jones Award for Excellence to a squadron Junior Officer. This year's recipient was LT Andy "PD" Peterson who many of you may remember from our Fist 11 Reunion in Pensacola. "PD" received an individual plaque and a check for \$500 from the Association. A perpetual plaque was also presented to Skipper Smith and XO Snowden for display in the squadron spaces. Andy is a very worthy recipient and we are proud to simultaneously honor him and the memory of our VT-17 shipmates. We are hopeful this annual award will both encourage and recognize the vital contribution of the junior officer corps of VFA-25.

Hook 13 commemorated the 40th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and the return of our POW's. We were so proud to have so many Fists who participated in events surrounding the Vietnam era in attendance. In particular it was an honor to again be with Al Nichols who was a former POW and shipmate later in the 70's. I have included a link to the Tailhook Symposiums below. I strongly urge you to view these historic panel discussions. Thanks to the Hook staff and J.R. Davis in particular for sharing these memorable events.

The FOFA Directors voted to add an additional member of the Board in the form of a Member at Large. Al Gorthy was nominated and later approved by the membership.

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Al Gorthy

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Thank you Al for bringing your leadership experience and humor to FOFA. We also held elections for President and Secretary for terms beginning January 2014. I was again nominated for President and Nick Johnson for Secretary. The membership voted in favor of Nick and I serving our last three-year terms. We then discussed the site of our next reunion in 2015. Venues such as Pensacola, Charleston and Norfolk were brought up. No decision has been made and we are soliciting your opinions. Contact your Directors with comments.

A final thank you to all who donated funds to help cover additional expenses at this year's reunion. We were proud to host our active duty squadron members and present the financial awards mentioned above. If you have not placed a donation and would like to do so now, please forward a check to Treasurer Chuck Webster or via PayPal on the Base Exchange on our website. Thank you in advance.

Dome

Symposium Link

<https://new.livestream.com/wab/tailhook/>



Blue Angels

The Blue Angels have been practicing together more lately than has previously been made public to be ready for a return to air shows if and when the Navy allows. The Blues may or may not participate in some fashion at Wings over Pensacola on Veteran's Day weekend.

The Air Force's Air Combat Command announced that it has directed some restored funding to grounded squadrons, including the Thunderbird team, which is based at Nellis Air Force Base, north of Las Vegas, NV

Aviator Memorial Association

NAS Lemoore COs and XO's,

First off, thank you for all the support and donations thus far towards our endeavor. I wanted to give a quick update to answer some of the questions that have been raised:

1. We are in the process of becoming a Tax-Exempt 501c3 so any donations made can be used as a tax right off.
2. "Donor Bricks" will be available at increments of \$250/\$500/\$1000. \$250 = text, \$500 =text/image, \$1000 = large brick with text/image. The bricks will be permanently displayed in the memorial.
3. We can accept cash, checks (payable to NAS Lemoore Aviator Memorial Association), Paypal transaction (account email address ekenny78@gmail.com), or credit card payments (in person or over the phone).

You can follow updates to the memorial via our Facebook page www.facebook.com/NASLEMOOREAMA. Many of you may have seen the sight went public yesterday. Please share it with your ready room to continue to get the word out.

Attached is the flyer we are handing out at Tailhook this year. The sculptors made his first attempt at sketching the statue. It's a good start but expect to see improvements over time on our Facebook page. As always, any donation will be greatly appreciated, but to have each Lemoore based squadron represented with a brick in the memorial would send a strong statement to other potential donor groups as well as show a strong sign of unity. Thanks for your consideration. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact Julie or me. ...and this weekend only we will be accepting Casino chips for donations as well (receipts available)!

Very respectfully,
LCDR Erik "Dook" Kenny

NAS Lemoore AMA is a Non-Profit organization started to raise funds in order to build a memorial to all aviators stationed at NAS Lemoore whom have gone before us and have paid the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of our Nation.

The statue will be located in a newly renovated memorial park next to Reeves Boulevard. Currently, there is a small parking lot that looks toward Runway 32L. The park will be extended to the south and the aviator memorial will look out toward the runway, constantly standing watch over those who are serving proudly at NAS Lemoore.



Gracious donors will be recognized by an engraved brick set in the memorial walk.

- \$250 – Engraved Brick
- \$500 – Engraved Brick with logo
- \$1000 - Large Engraved brick with logo set next to Aviator statue
- \$2000 – Large Granite brick on Concrete bench

Donations are gratefully accepted by:
Check – please make payable to "NAS Lemoore AMA"
PayPal – NAS Lemoore AMA business account is linked to LCDR Kenny's email address: ekenny78@gmail.com
Secure Credit Card – all major credit cards accepted in person or via phone. A receipt will be provided.

LCDR ERIK "DOOK" KENNY

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or

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Visit our website at: www.facebook.com/NASLEMOOREAMA



Andy "PD" Peterson, with XO Snowden and CO Smith is presented the inaugural plaque for the LTJG Harry Jones Memorial Award for Excellence along with a check for \$500.00 Frosty and Tsu are holding the perpetual award plaque that will remain with the squadron.



Skipper Smith presents AOAN Joshua Berna with his Education Grant Certificate and check.

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

SKIPPER'S CORNER

Greetings Fists! As I write this I am still in awe of the epic week up at Hook / Fist 13. All enjoyed an amazing weekend of catching up with old shipmates and meeting new ones. We cannot thank the Association enough for the inclusion during Thursday night's dinner and the hospitality shown throughout the weekend. For those who did not catch the update at Fist 13, the squadron started out the quarter with a two-week detachment in late August to Eglin AFB, Florida. We were charged with standing up a rotating detachment of support aircraft from the strike fighter community to provide currency flights and chase support for the F-35C Lightning II. With the JSF and its complex software in its infancy, there are many bugs to work out of the system. The internal benefit for VFA-25 in supporting this effort is the augment in travel money and flight hours provided by CNAF. Due to our continued operation under the FY12 Continuing Resolution, the squadron's flight operations are limited to the tactical hard deck, which equates to about 11 hours per pilot per month. Participation in these detachments has kept the Fist pilots proficiency at level above the ragged edge of safety and allowed the Skipper to sleep a little better each night.

This month we welcomed back 12 Fist Sailors from a three month TOPGUN detachment as we prepare to send 15 Sailors and two jets to support the fall TOPGUN class. The staff at TOPGUN is charged with developing and evaluating tactics. That

mission cannot be accomplished without the presence of fleet aircraft with the latest combat systems. As a result, we will support our third straight TOPGUN class with the likelihood of more to come next year.

Looking ahead to the next quarter, the squadron is scheduled for another Eglin detachment from 15 to 25 October. In November, we have the Chief of Naval Air Forces Aviation Maintenance Inspection. In December, a small detachment will embark with an FRS CQ evolution and conduct some much needed training in the carrier environment.

Sending our great appreciation for the support to the Fist team and I wish all the best as we enter the holiday season!

Very Respectfully,
Fist One



FROM THE COCKPIT

By: LT Jason "JB" Ely

The stage was set, high noon over the Pacific, 2 Fists v Lear/Banner. With 300 rounds of 20 mm a piece, there's no way that banner is going to make it back. LT Dan "Tigger" Owens and I headed west to the W-283 to wreak havoc on this unsuspecting banner. G-warm complete, we set up in the stack to wait our turn as the Tophatters finished their sessions. Then we hear: "Cam 12 off safe, Winchester". Show time! We spiral down out of the stack to 12,000 and set up. "Fist 11, in Cold". Tigger sets up for a text book pass. As he peels off, I roll in. "Fist 12 in Cold". Wow that banner isn't like the one's flying down the beach saying "Come eat at McGuire's".

As I'm thinking this, my run is out to and I pull off safe early. Great, off to a good start. No time to waste, "Fist 11 in hot". With that, I watch Tigger's jet in the chute and as he closes, a burst of smoke leaves the nose and peels away. Nailed it! "Fist 12 in hot" Here goes nothing. I line up on the banner and let a quick burst go. Little high but I can fix that. This goes on for 3 more iterations and we're Winchester. Fists 2, banner 0.

Even during the financial state our community is in, the Fists are still charging forward with many great opportunities that have been coming our way. Along with the banner shoot above, we were fortunate in standing up a continuous rotating detachment at VFA-101 at Eglin AFB in Florida. During our stay, we we're witness to the first VFA-101 F-35C Lightning II flight in which our skipper CDR Smith was a part of. An added benefit working out of Eglin was the amount of Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT) we were able to partake in. Local F-16, F-15, F-22, T-38 and even F-35B's joined us in the Whiskey areas south of Destin for some outstanding training that we would not normally be able to see in Central California.

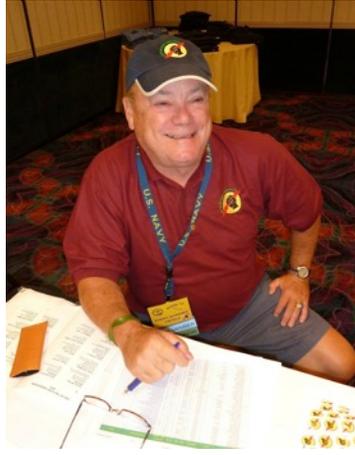
The Fists would like that thank the entire Fist of the Fleet Association for an outstanding reunion in Reno this year. It was great to meet everybody and learn where we came from as a squadron. Congratulations go out to a few of our JOPA who will be keeping up the Fists name elsewhere in the Fleet. LT Mike "Waylon" Jennings passed the TOPGUN SFTI course with flying colors and will be moving on to VFA-101 at Eglin AFB. LT Andy "PD" Peterson will be moving on to be an F-5 adversary pilot at VFC-111 in Key West and LT Ben "Mario" Rothenburg will be heading east be an Instructor at VFA-106 at NAS Oceana. We wish them all the best.



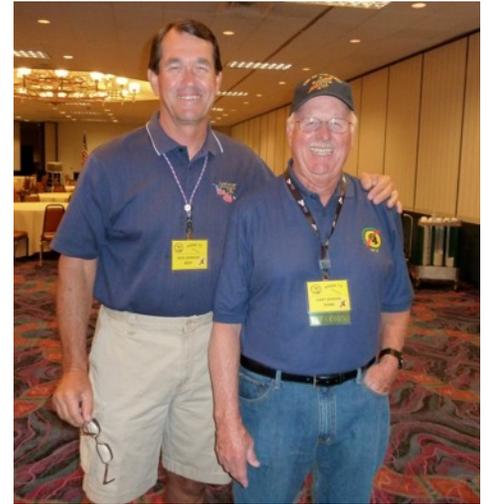
REUNION PHOTOS



CDR "Tsu" Smith's presentation was informative as well as funny and was received with much appreciation.



Webmaster Robert "Pistols" Schreiber mans the check-in desk



Secretary Nick "Beef" Johnson and Gary "Dome" Kerans were both unanimously reelected for 3 more years.



JO's and Old Salts, Sea Stories by Chuck Thom and Clint Johnson



A few of the Lang Vei boys: Dale Pellot, Al Nichols (POW) Jay Stone, Bruce Marcus



XO CDR "Frosty" Snowden and CO CDR "TSU" Smith



Sat 9/7 Symposium Hanoi Hilton panel

Left to right, Capt. Porter Halyburton, Capt. Charlie Plumb Jr., Capt. Jerry Coffee, and CDR. Everett "Ed" Alvarez



Always and Forever we are the Fist of the Fleet

Corrections for July Fistory: "Yankee Station".

Thanks to Jay Stone for catching this one. The proper sequence of movement for *Enterprise* is: depart Alameda 1/3, arrive Saesbo 1/19, depart 1/23 for Subic but ordered north and remained in the vicinity of South Korea for almost a month.

It also appears evident that the call to Zip and Leg directing them to Lang Vei came not from the Coral Sea but the daylight Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center, a C-130 call sign "Hillsboro" operating over the panhandle of Laos. The night-time ABCCC call sign was "Moonbeam."

FISTORY - LANG VEI: THE SOUND OF DEMONS

Ed. Note: in the absence of some of the actual creative license was employed to reconstruct radio traffic.

“No gallant action was ever accomplished without danger” (John Paul Jones)

The overnight air activities began within 30 minutes of the NVA assault when an AC-47 “Spooky” gun-ship arrived. However, due to the confusion on the ground it was unable to employ its mini-guns but remained on station to provide illumination rounds through the rest of the night. Air Force FAC Capt. G. Harrington began to direct strikes in earnest at 0120 as a Martin B-57 Canberra loaded with CBU’s pushed down through the dark to drop ordnance on the east-west road to inhibit the movement of the NVA. At 0136 he contacted Capt. Willoughby on the ground to inform him he had 2 F-100 Super Sabres with 750 lb GP bombs and was told to direct them to attack the old camp 2 clicks to the east. They returned a few minutes later and attacked the east side of the camp entrance at about 0210⁽¹⁾. 0225 and a second FAC arrived to relieve Harrington who had run out of marking rockets. At around 0245 all contact was lost with the TOC and could not be regained. However the FAC on station continued to deliver air support with A-4D Skyhawks, an F-8 Crusader and a VNAF A-1E Skyraider which was reportedly shot down⁽²⁾.



Left: Martin B-57 Canberra

Right: North American F-100 Super Sabre



At 0300 John Seats, Covey 077, arrived in time to watch another Canberra deliver its load of CBU’s. Also at about 0300 there was a pre-planned B-52 strike on Co Roc mountain in support of Khe Sanh which also helped to alleviate the pressure on Lang Vei. About this time 077 marked tanks with Willy Pete and a Canberra delivered 4-500 lb bombs on a target and destroyed it. 2 Air Force Skyraiders made two passes on the camp dropping their CBU’s, one of which caused Sgt. Craig to be wounded. This was followed by an F-8U, and at 0400 2 more Skyhawks made strafing runs. For the next 2 hours air activity died down a bit and as communication with the TOC had not yet been restored it was impossible to determine what was happening on the ground. Covey 688⁽³⁾ arrived overhead at 0630 at about the same time that Coral Sea received the “Feet Dry” call from the Canasta pilots. Fifteen minutes after sunrise at about 0645 2 more A-4Ds were directed in for strafing runs. The growing daylight revealed the NVA troops and their remaining tanks out in the open, swarming over the camp and firing into the TOC. If they were still shooting, somebody was still in there shooting back. 30 minutes later everything changed.

“Covey 688, Hillsboro”. “Copy, Hillsboro”. “688, I have a flight of Navy Skyraiders inbound to your position, call sign Canasta”. “Copy, Hillsboro”. “Canasta, Covey 688.” “Copy, 688”. “Canasta I have you in sight, 2 aircraft, Standby”. “Roger, 688”. LCDR Rosario “Zip” Rausa, in Canasta 406, had LTJG Larry “Leg” Gardiner in 413 make a quick call: “Waterboy,⁽⁴⁾ Canasta 413”. “Go ahead, 413”. “Waterboy, advise Mustang Strike heavy overcast, request triple cycle strike package.” “Copy 413, will advise”.

“Canasta, 688”. “688, go ahead”. “Canasta, friendlies are being overrun, request you strafe all positions”. “Copy, 688, where do we start?” “Canasta, Standby”. The overcast didn’t seem to be very thick, but it was hugging the terrain and every now and then would seem to lift and begin to breakup. “Canasta, 688”. “Go”. “Canasta I’m going to take a risk here. I can push this thing to 150 kts. Can you follow me down through a hole?” “Affirmative”.

Pushing over, the little O-2 Skymaster led the 2 aircraft through a “sucker hole” in the clouds for a head-on run towards the camp. From their cockpits they could see the disaster before them. Several fires were blazing and the NVA were concentrating on their final push to take the TOC. There was a large hole blown in to one side and even now they were pouring gasoline, grenades and CS gas inside in an effort to kill or capture the remaining Green Beret. Out of food, out of water, down to their last rounds, they were hugging the floor trying to breath. Every man inside, wounded or not, was preparing for the last assault. Suddenly out of the fog and mist the O-2 passed overhead at less than 300 ft and pulled back in to the clouds. Behind him came the Skyraiders with cannons winking, the mixed rounds of 20 mm AP, HE and tracer tearing the hell out everything in their path. Bodies spinning beneath them they roared over the camp and pulled up, leaving a cloud of swirling dust and dirt in their wake. Standing their aircraft on their wingtips they bent around, changed direction and made a second pass in the face of intense small arms fire from the NVA. During one of these runs Lt. Wilkens was wounded by 20 mm fire. He had been out in the open hiding near the dispensary with Lt Col Schungel.

“Canasta, 688”. “Go!” “Can you drop Nape?” “Negative 688, 81’s and 82’s only. Do you want them? We can use the 81’s down low”. “Affirm, Canasta, you need to hose everything down”. “Copy, 688”. Playing it by ear, the 2 pilots made their run in between 300 and 500 ft, released and pulled up to beat the 750 ft minimums. But, as the weapons had been fused to arm from a much higher release point they failed to detonate and went thudding and skipping across the compound. The 2 pilots were trying like hell to make a difference in the battle below them. The FAC pulled them off target and held them high and dry for a bit while he tried to restore communication with the men on the ground. The overcast began to break and soon became scattered cloud to around 3000 ft. Zip and Leg made another run at the camp and released at 1000 ft AGL. Again, no explosions, just duds. There was a total of 7 low-level attacks by the Skyraiders. During their runs Zip could see a few of the Green Beret on the ground near the camp’s perimeter and by 2 tanks. They would duck in to the jungle during the low passes.

FISTORY - LANG VEI: THE SOUND OF DEMONS



"Zip" Rausa at Lang Vei. Cover art by Mark Postlethwaite for the Osprey book USN Skyraider Units of the Vietnam War.

The 8th pass was another strafing run and then "Covey 688, Canasta is Winchester". "Copy Canasta, Air Force Hobo flight is in sight, exit to the southeast". "Roger, 688". "Hobo Flight, Covey 688". "Go ahead 688, this is Hobo". "Hobo, report your package". "688, Hobo flight, 2 aircraft, Nape and CBU". "Copy Hobo, Nape and CBU. I have your Skyraiders in sight, Standby". "Hobo, Roger". "Leg, Zip!" "Copy, Zip." "Let's Ziggy back to the boat!". "Roger that! Ziggy Na!"(5).

While Hobo flight, A-1E's from the 602nd Fighter Squadron, 14th Air Wing Commando, took over and began to work the battlefield Zip made a quick call back to Coral Sea. "Strike, Canasta 406". "Go ahead, 406". "Strike, request you advise VA-25 Ready Room, request Napalm on all additional strike aircraft". "406, copy your request, will advise, over". But the second strike package of 4 aircraft had already launched and even now was "Feet Dry" over Vietnam and approaching Lang Vei. Some time around 0900 Zip and Leg recovered aboard Coral Sea. Wings folded they taxied up to the bow where their plane captains waited to tie them down. As Zip climbed down Hanson, one of the squadron troubleshooters pointed out a hole in the aircraft. Zip had 2, one round passed through the centerline tank and went up and out the starboard side, another through the

starboard flap. Leg took a hit through the hell hole which struck his No. 2 radio, and another damaged his ARN-6 antenna. Shaking his head Zip hurried down to the Ready Room and submitted a brief after-action report. "Friendly outpost being overrun. Held off some troops, some more probably killed. More detailed BDA to follow." While Zip and Leg were debriefing in the Ready Room to an excited group of pilots the 2nd flight of Canasta pilots were hotly engaged at Lang Vei, and the 3rd flight was prepping for launch. At around 0800 Toby Rushforth, Covey 252 arrived over Lang Vei. He had left Da Nang about 0710 and was immediately vectored to the camp. Covey 688 with 252 observing began to lead the next Canasta flight in to the fray. The 2 sections of VA-25 (Skelton:lead 403/Hill:wing 405 and Marcus:lead 414/Nichols:wing 411) then formed a daisy chain in the rain and haze of a 5000' ceiling and once again drove the enemy from the TOC. Every time the Skyraiders dove down in to the clouds 252 would hold his breath, expecting any second to see columns of black smoke that would mark the graves of the pilots, but each time they reappeared to dive down again. With a little bit more air space the 4 planes were able to expend their ordnance (16 Mk 81/16 Mk 82), releasing their bomb loads from 2000 ft with solid effect and keeping the NVA out of the compound and keeping the roads cleared to support the initial advance of US Forces towards Lang Vei. Around 0900 radio contact with the TOC was finally reestablished and the situation was not looking very good. Every man had been wounded, some critically. Some of the men were missing and there was no contact with them. There was a brief lull in the activity around the camp, but back on Coral Sea a battle of different kind of battle was brewing.

While monitoring the mission radio traffic someone on Coral Sea thought it prudent to send a message to the CAG CDR J. B. Linder. After reviewing the information LCDR William "Speed" Ritzmann was ordered to report to the ship's "War Room". CAG asked for the minimums. Speed responded 500 ft for such work. CAG was appalled and dismissed him with orders to have Zip report. Speed came back to the Ready Room and told Zip to see the CAG and explain his story. Upon arrival he was confronted with the CAG, the ship's CO CAPT William H. Shawcross, the ship's Air Operations Officer CDR F. L. Nelson and several others all seated behind a long table covered in a green cloth(6). Zip explained what had happened and the CAG and CO just shook their heads. He could see he was in trouble. CAG asked him if he was aware that he went below Air Wing minimums. Zip replied "Yes Sir, I take responsibility for that. The troops were desperate and wanted us to drop on their own positions". CAG remained flat in his questions and responses: "No wonder the bombs didn't go off, not enough time in flight to arm".

There had been several duds in the past three days, most of which were released at 2000 ft AGL or better and Zip had been submitting ordnance malfunction cards regarding them. With 4 seconds of arming time required, preliminary information indicated that at 1000 ft AGL release on a 30 degree glide the bombs traveled 4.8 seconds in flight. CAG continued with his questions: "Did you get hit?". "I took 2 holes". "It's a wonder it wasn't worse". At this point CDR Nelson interjected on Zip's behalf: "They were desperate down there. The A-1's were right to go in" but the more important ears seemed deaf to his comment. The CO muttered something about the Air Force and CAG asked "What Air Force flights were around?" Zip said there were 3 FAC's and a Spooky gunship who left before the shooting started and 2 A-1E Hobos with Napalm and CBUs.

Zip had a bad feeling that were certain political considerations here and he felt sick to his stomach. It was almost as if they shouldn't have been there and were in fact doing the work of the Air Force. But CAG still had one final question: "Why did you do this?" Zip's answer must have been the closest thing to a slap in the face the CAG ever got: "Because, Sir, we thought it was justified". Zip was then rather coolly dismissed. While this was playing out the Skipper of VA-25, CDR Church, was leading his strike package against the NVA. Meanwhile Speed prepared for his own flight and Jay Stone went to start debriefing the returning pilots.



FISTORY - LANG VEI: THE SOUND OF DEMONS

Covey 688 had finally departed the area due to a rough engine leaving Toby Rushforth in Covey 252 to take over the air operations. There was another burst of radio calls before things began to settle into a semi-ordered pattern again. "Covey 688, Hillsboro". "Covey 688, Hillsboro?" "Hillsboro, Covey 252, 688 has left, say again, 688 has left, copy?" "Copy, 252. 252 Navy Canasta flight inbound, Canasta 402 has the lead, copy?" "Roger, 402 has the lead, thank you." "Hillsboro". "Canasta 402, Covey 252?" "Covey 252, this is Canasta Actual, go ahead." "Actual, report your package, over." "252, Canasta, 4 aircraft, Mark 82 daisy-cutters, rockets, Nape, 20 mike." "Roger, Actual, copy your package. I have you in sight to my southwest. Standby southwest at 4000, ceiling is 10,000, visibility 10



nautical miles but low cloud and fog in the target area." "Roger, copy, copy 252." At around 1000 hrs CDR Church ordered his section into combat trail as Toby requested they try to find another "sucker hole" in the clouds and push down to engage the enemy. They spiraled down into a narrow valley and flew north, encountering intermittent AA fire from the hills on either side. The valley widened to where Lang Vei was located and the FAC immediately put them to work. Gaining a little more separation, the two sections once again forming a daisy chain, the Skipper following the FAC's instructions. It seemed to the pilots that Lang Vei was just a fishbowl, with ground below, solid clouds above, and mountains that disappeared into the clouds on nearly all sides. Because of the cloud and terrain restraints they couldn't keep up enough speed or altitude for the mil-setting "gouge" sheets for the bombsight to be accurate for anything other than lining-up on the run. They were reduced to "feeling" when to drop bombs, or fire guns and rockets. Once again it was stick and rudder flying at its most basic level. The daisy-cutters were nasty. They were Mk 82 500-lb bombs, but had an 18" fuse extender screwed in to the nose so the weapon would detonate about 18" above the ground upon impact. More of the bomb material could then spread out its destructive force, ripping down everything in its target area. The 5" Zuni rockets carried in the LAU-7 pods could be fired singly or all four at once. But Napalm could be used with terrible effect on the enemy. It isn't "target sensitive" and doesn't care if sticks to something hard or soft but is devastating in its consequences, and can be used to smash the morale of enemy troops. Bob Hagen in Canasta 405 was one of the least experienced pilots in the squadron and today he was flying wing on the Skipper. He was swamped with work trying to keep flight integrity, listening for instructions, selecting ordnance and adjusting the bombsight. On several occasions he "fell behind" the aircraft. On one pass he saw an NVA soldier firing his AK-47 at him as he pulled up, and on another run there was an automatic weapon shooting at him. Seeing the tracers come up and the gun flashes he noticed it was slightly left of his track so he adjusted to it and fired several short bursts. Tracking his rounds he could anticipate where the burst would land so he eased forward on the stick and walked his rounds towards the weapons' position. He judged it correctly and his rounds concentrated on the gun position and the area lit up like a sparkler and fell silent(7). The second section with Dale Pellot in 410 flying wing on Chuck Thom in 414 rolled in hot as the Covey 252 told Chuck not to bomb the bunker but he could hit all other targets in sight.. As Chuck would release his bombs the FAC gave corrections either left or right to Dale who would adjust on the targets and lay in his ordnance. As Dale would pull out he could see bodies spread out all over the camp but couldn't tell if they were NVA or friendlies at that point. Then the ground would light up with the sparkling flashes of the muzzles of the NVA small arms as they tried to draw a bead on the wheeling Skyraiders as time and again they rolled in to engage the enemy troops as they continued to assault the TOC. About 1030 they completed their last of 6 passes, and calling out "Winchester" the Skipper lead his flight back to Coral Sea. Behind them the NVA began to regroup for another attack on the TOC. Toby Rushforth had been running his O-2 at full throttle for the last hour and now his engines began to run rough; he had to head back to Da Nang but not before John Seats flying Covey 077 returned to begin understanding the battlefield conditions in an effort to keep the close air support pressure on the NVA and continue to provide assistance to those still trapped in the burning TOC.

An NVA soldier would later record in his memoirs:

"As the air attacks intensify, the world becomes an almost silent venue as our ears seek refuge from the constant assault. Only when the swirling fog creates tiny fissures do we actually see the aircraft, yet at times, we feel and smell the discharge from the powerful engines as they pass directly above at such low levels, as the engines blast the earth and those that seek refuge within her bosom, the sky is filled with a demonic howl that at times seems to become more of a ghastly moan conjured from hell itself....We realize that the enemy aircraft are attacking those whom we encountered the day before, the ones with bleeding ears and noses that lack the senses to hear the approach of the howling death; from our holes our Squad hurls curses toward the sky...many question aloud...how much more can those men endure"(8).

Footnotes

(1) It may have been a second flight of F-100s that attacked at 0210. (2) Totally unconfirmed. I find no record that this aircraft ever existed. (3) To this day Covey 688 is unknown. (4) Waterboy was the ground-based communication center. (5) Tagalog *sige na* "Go now, Hurry up", or *sigá na* "Come on. Do it!" (6) The first recorded mention of the green table cloth being used on a naval vessel for disciplinary action is in the Rules of Oleron dated 1266. (7) Paragraph based on an Bob Hagen's notes. (8) Excerpt from "Red Plateau. Memoir of a North Vietnamese Soldier." By Nguyen Van Tuan". The majority of pages 6 and 7 are based on 7 pages of hand written notes (undated) from Zip Rausa and excerpts from his presentation at the '09 Lang Vei Reunion video and together represent the most complete picture of his actions and activities.

NEXT TIME IN FISTORY - LANG VEI, TURN AND BURN.