



Fist of the Fleet Association

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

NEWSLETTER

July 2020

Preserving the Past Providing for Today
Promoting the Future

SUMMER EDITION

By: Jerry "Ricochet" Fritze

My first "real" bike was a *Schwinn Stingray*, exactly like the pic below. On any given summer day we would mount up and let our imaginations loose on the world. Our rides became horses, jet fighters, race cars, spaceships and anything else we desired. All we needed was a squirt gun and a water balloon, plus the appropriate military or western accoutrements, or sometimes just swim trunks. Eventually boys grow up and leave "play" behind for better adventures. I got my first *Schwinn* 10-speed when I was 14 and every summer we would ride from South Gate to Seal Beach, a distance of some 20 miles, at least once a week. Although there are many routes we almost invariably found ourselves on Cherry Ave going over Signal Hill. I rode everywhere for the next four years, primarily to school and to the various parks where we played softball with my cleats, glove, mask and uniform shoved in a backpack. After the Navy, and in the fall of '79, I was in college in Sterling, CO and bought a nondescript 10-speed from a friend for \$50. I replaced the brake pads and adjusted the calipers, tightened the cables, reset the front derailleur and then used it to get from campus to my night job at the Great Western Sugar mill. If the weather was bad I had a few friends who could drive me to work. I gave the bike away at the end of the school year. Back in South Gate I usually walked everywhere I needed to go but I did take the bus to work or school. Flash forward to June of '93 when AT&T relo'd me from LA to Phoenix. I bought a road/trail bike from a local shop and for the next ten years rode to work *every day* in all weather conditions. Just over 11 miles door-to-door and on the weekends I would head out to the trails where I could really crash the gears and catch some air. By the time Michelle and I were leaving for Wisconsin I had cracked the weld where the lower frame tube joins the crank casing.

We had all these plans for hiking up here. After all, we walked in all the 10K charity events in Phoenix which they had three times a year. But, for various reasons that never happened. As long as I had an office to go to I could walk for half an hour at lunch but once I became a home office employee even that went away. Last year I fessed-up to my doctor about a weird chest pain I have. After extensive tests in cardio/vasc and pulmonary, including the "We're actually NOT trying to kill you" stress test and lung cancer screening the result was "You have a weird chest pain". Okay, that was last summer. Since then there has been an internal struggle that's been building up on me. When I left AZ I weighed a very toned (and tanned) 205 lbs. The additional 40 lbs is really uncomfortable as hell, and after my physical a couple of weeks ago (via teleconference) I told my doctor I've had enough: I'm going back to biking. She was so excited about that I thought she was going to jump through the phone and hug me. Michelle said "If you're going to ride then so am I". We bought a pair of *Specialized Sirmus* road/trail bikes and I had mine upgraded before I brought it home. I rode for 20 min the first day, 30 min the next day and when I got home I ordered a pair of padded saddle covers from Amazon with overnight delivery. It was like sitting on a 4x4. I forgot a few other minor things also; but hey, it's be 18 years.

Growing up I used to watch the news on KABC Channel 7. One of the co-anchors was Christine Lund, who would be forever immortalized as the "bubble-headed bleach-blonde" in The Eagles hit "*Dirty Laundry*". Dr. Art Ulene hosted the health segment and one evening said: You don't need to follow fad diets, take weight-loss pills or dietary supplements or even buy expensive equipment. If you really want to lose weight and live a longer, healthier life all you need to do is *eat less and exercise more*. Blindingly obvious, but so many don't get the message. With that it's time to change, grab my Gatorade and hit the road. Eventually I will be back on the trails but I'll never catch *big* air again because while I may be crazy I ain't stupid.

~Later!~



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

Time to lower my mask and take a break from the COVID-19 madness to comment on how crazy this year has been for everyone. If you're out on the open road visiting a National Park or camping, good for you. If you're working from home with bored kids screaming in the background, you have my sympathy. And if you're in Lemoore trying to bag some flight hours without catching the virus, enjoy; I'm envious. And of course, if you were looking forward to the Navy-Notre Dame game in Ireland or Tailhook 2020 with our Fist 2020 Reunion, I share your disappointment. And we're going to go back to the drawing board and think about next year with our fingers crossed. Your board members, who have been very supportive during this disruptive time, have learned to do Zoom video conferences as we hold our meetings and discuss how to strengthen our organization and finally hold a reunion for all our members, officers and enlisted, at an affordable cost.

Meanwhile, an attempt to live life normally struggles with the threat of COVID-19 sickness or the collateral damage of financial injury. I hope all of you are doing well and that family and friends are safe and healthy.

My best to all of you,

Chalks

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Blue Angels Tour Dates

Remaining Tour Dates Subject to Cancellation Due to COVID

19/20 NAS Oceana Air Show VA

27/29 MCAS Miramar Air Show CA

Oct 3/4 NAS Point Mugu Naval Base Ventura County Air Show CA

10/11 San Francisco Fleet Week CA

16/17 NAS Pensacola Blue Angels Homecoming Air Show

SKIPPER'S CORNER

Greetings! Pleasure to be addressing you as the 73rd Commanding Officer of the finest Strike Fighter Squadron in the US Navy. Humbling to be sitting at a desk once occupied by so many incredible leaders. These first couple months have gone by quickly. The pandemic continues to impact how we do business. Nevertheless, in true Fist fashion, this incredible team has risen to the challenge. Our mitigation strategy has proven effective – as we continue to execute our flight hours and stay ahead with all scheduled maintenance. Sadly we are saying goodbye to a few more FIST aircraft. VFA-211 on the east coast is transitioning from the F model. Given our lengthy 'maintenance phase', we are being asked to transfer three FIST aircraft to their squadron indefinitely. Hard to see such beautiful, well-maintained aircraft leave this flight line. However, we know they will be headed to a command beginning work-ups – keeping FIST aircraft in the fight.

Sixteen Fist Sailors were just advanced to the next highest pay-grade off this most recent exam cycle. Perhaps the most enjoyable part of this job so far has been witnessing the look on their faces once I told them the good news. What an honor.

Congrats to LT 'Meathole' Honeycutt – our newest qualified combat section lead! Huge milestone – and well deserved. Nice job Meathole!

Keep safe and sane in this crazy world of ours. Look forward to sharing more Fist accomplishments during our next chat. Damn Proud!

V/R,

CDR Jake "SMiR" Rose



FROM THE COCKPIT: By: LT Chris "Meathole" Honeycutt

The train has arrived at the station! The SFWT "Pain Train" that is! On 14 July 2020 I passed my SFWT Level 3 check ride and officially joined the ranks of combat section leads. This is a major milestone for every junior officer that cannot be accomplished without the dedication and support from the entire command. The syllabus included multiple briefing labs, simulators and twenty flights – a few of which I needed to see multiple times. Ultimately, the syllabus concludes with a 2v6 section defensive counter air facing a very capable threat vice the old self-escort strike check ride.

The amount of team work required to get me trained and qualified can't be overstated. From my training officer's and other Fist pilot's mentorship, the entire maintenance team consistently providing FMC up jets and the AO's loading all the ordnance and expendables required, I was always provided the tools and resources needed to succeed. I am incredibly humbled and eternally grateful for the hard work and dedication from the entire command to get me over the finish line. Now time for a quick break to enjoy the scorching hot Lemoore summer at Trash Blast'ers pool before getting back aboard the train for Level 4! Damn Proud to be a FIST!



LCDR Matson Last Flight

FROM THE HANGER DECK:

Hello and good day, Fist of the Fleet Association. My name is Airman Melody Doropan, AKA "Tiny" for some. I was born and raised in the beautiful islands of the Philippines. Growing up, I watched the film *Men of Honor* and right then and there I had a glimpse of the Navy life and what my dad went through just to give us a comfortable life. I wanted the same for my future kids, so serving in the US Navy became my calling. On July 23, 2018, I decided to enlist in the world's greatest Navy. It was a really big step for me. Leaving everything behind for a while, changing careers and doing things that normal people won't do. Joining the Navy helped me build my character and gave me more opportunities in life such as traveling the world and seeing places that you didn't know existed. It has also been an opportunity to work and meet people that will help you become a better person. I have met people in VFA-25 that have motivated and inspired me to have a great work ethic.

When I first reported to the command, I was sent to the line shack as a trainee. From there, I learned to do my job with the help of my fellow "line shackers" and got qualified with every possible qualification. It was also during my time in the line shack that I earned my EAWS pin during our 10-month deployment onboard the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (CVN 72). My first deployment as a Fist was definitely one for the books. Working on the flight deck then being assigned TAD to the wardroom was very challenging. It was like day one for me all over again. But a Fist never backs down to any challenge. While working in the wardroom, I was recognized by the ship's Supply Officer as the "FSA of the Month". One thing I learned from being a part of the Fist of the Fleet is to take pride in everything that you do no matter how big or small it is. Know you are making an impact and a great change. Always find joy in any situation and celebrate even the tiniest success that you've achieved because you worked hard for it. For me that's the Fist Pride.



As my journey continues in VFA-25 and now as a member of the LS shop, I can see that I am now in the right place headed towards the right direction with guidance from those who also take pride in what they do. Leaders like: LS1 Flores, LS2 Fernandez, and LS2 Barajas who trained and taught me everything I need to learn for striking to be a Logistics Specialist. And from AMCS Tackett, LTJG Vasquez-Rivera, ATC Moreno, and LTJG Branam who showed me more doors for opportunities for me to be where I am right now. For the duration of my stay here I am looking forward to learning more things that will benefit me in achieving more of my goals and becoming a good leader one day. And for that I am damn proud to be a Fist!

Have you paid your 2020 Dues?

Annual Dues: \$25/YR

Life Time Dues \$200

Mail dues to Financial Officer:

Chuck Webster 2441 Lock B Road North Clarksville TN 37043

Only Voting Members have access to the Directory

Become a Voting Member!

Visit the Base Exchange at

www.fistofthefleet.org

DID YOU KNOW: NAVY, MILITARY AND OTHER INFORMATION

Madeline Swegle makes history as US Navy's 1st Black female fighter pilot.

By: Kiara Brantly-Jones Good Morning America Jul 11 '20

The US Navy celebrated a historic moment this week as it announced LTJG Madeline Swegle was set to become its first Black female tactical fighter pilot. Swegle has earned her wings as a US Navy fighter pilot and will receive her "Wings of Gold" in late July, according to a tweet posted on Thursday by the Chief of Naval Air Training: Rear Adm. Robert "Gimp" Westendorff: "Bravo Zulu to LTJG Madeline Swegle on completing the Tactical Air (Strike) aviator syllabus. Swegle is the US Navy's first known Black female TACAIR pilot and will receive her Wings of Gold later this month. HOOYAH!"

The announcement comes more than four decades after women first received their wings in the Navy. Capt. Rosemary B. Mariner, the first woman to command an operational naval aviation squadron, earned her wings in 1974, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command website. Brenda Robinson, who earned her wings in 1980, became the first African American female graduate from the Navy's Aviation Officer Candidate School, according to the nonprofit organization Women in Aviation.

Swegle, a graduate of the US Naval Academy, is receiving an outpouring of praise and support for her achievement. "Very proud of LTJG Swegle," wrote Rear Adm. Paula D. Dunn, the Navy's vice chief of information, via Twitter on Thursday. "Go forth and kick butt." "Congratulations, LTJG Swegle!" tweeted Sen. Elizabeth Warren on Saturday. "You make the US Navy and our country stronger." Pioneering athlete Billie Jean King, comedian D.L. Hughley, Sen. Kamala Harris and former NASA astronaut Scott Kelly were among those who also congratulated Swegle.

For the original article: <https://www.yahoo.com/gma/madeline-swegle-makes-history-us-navys-1st-black-034554026--abc-news-topstories.html>



Meet the new Chief of Naval Air Training at Naval Air Station-Corpus Christi

By: John Oliva, Corpus Christi Caller Times Jun 5 '20

Rear Adm. Robert "Gimp" Westendorff took over command of the Chief of Naval Air Training Friday. Former commander Rear Adm. Daniel "Dozer" Dwyer was recently promoted to lead the US Cyber Command in Fort Meade, MD. The Change of Command Ceremony was live-streamed on Facebook due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Only family members were permitted to attend in-person. Vice Adm. DeWolfe Miller III, Commander of the US Naval Air Forces in San Diego, CA, spoke at the event via teleconference. Miller wished Dwyer luck on his promotion and reminded him of two words of advice he gave him years ago. "Lead boldly," Miller said. "And you did that. You inserted technology, virtual reality; you improved the way we trained and you set the conditions for how we will make those improvements in the future." Miller said Westendorff was chosen for the position because of his capabilities. "I know your approach to this. In about 15 minutes, when the weight of it is on your shoulders, you'll start to appreciate the magnitude of the position you're about to enter."

Dwyer was presented with the Legion of Merit Silver Star award for service toward his conduct in the performance of outstanding service as Chief of Naval Air Training and Commander in Naval Air Force Deputy for aviation training from Jul '19 to Jun '20. His wife, Christina Dwyer, received the Yellow Rose of Texas from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. Dwyer thanked Miller for his remarks, leadership and mentorship. According to Dwyer, the CNATRA mission is simple. "We take in our nation's very best; we train them to become the most lethal, naval aviators on this planet," Dwyer said. "Every year, over 1,100 of our nation's best men and women come through our doors. In about two to three years time, they earn their Wings of Gold and go forward and man the cockpits that are deployed today on our ships at sea." Dwyer said every one of them makes him proud.

Westendorff said he wishes luck to Dwyer and hopes to create a bond between the leaders of the community. "I haven't met most of you yet, but I'm looking forward to getting to know you and working together as we continue this great relationship with the Navy, the city, the county and the state officials," Adm. Westendorff said he's deeply honored to serve as chief. "Admiral Dwyer and his predecessors have paved the way for the future of naval aviation. Their training programs have been modernized, they're accepting new aircraft and I will continue to lead to the front." Knowing he has a support network from Dwyer and Miller, Westendorff said he will continue to train aviators saying "It's a daunting challenge, and I'm up for the task"

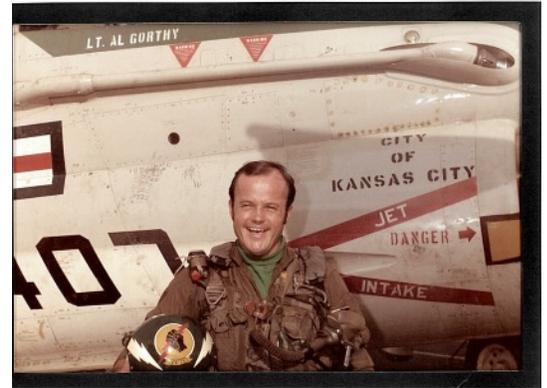


Editor's Note: RAdm Westendorff reported to VFA-25 as XO in Dec '08 and assumed command in Apr '10. He was instrumental in setting the tone for squadron participation in the creation of the Newsletter and for that we will always be grateful. Thanks Gimp, *Press on!*

GREEN TAILS OVER 'NAM: VOICES

Al Gorthy from <https://greyeagle1.com/1972/12/linebacker-ii/> posted Dec 31,2018:

Just checked my log book. I flew 8 sorties off Ranger during Linebacker II, 4 day and 4 night. I can recall that we were assigned Iron-hand missions just off the coast of Haiphong. I know we also mined the harbor, but can't recall if it was during Linebacker II or a different time. I try to repress those moments of sheer terror. I do recall the light show, both on the ground from the B-52 bomb impact and the explosions of SAMs chasing us and impacting the B-52s. There were so many SAMs being fired that it was hard to tell if they were being shot at us or the B-52s above you. Just recall that when the SAMs exploded, it would light up the entire cockpit. Seemed pretty CLOSE and scared the shit out of me. The target areas (at least Haiphong) were covered with low clouds. Could not see all the way to Hanoi, but I'm assuming it was also overcast. The airspace above was clear. Every aircraft had their twirlies on. It was astonishing how many aircraft were in one little piece of sky. The B 52s came in at high altitudes, well above us. We were orbiting just off the coast at about 15K. It was eerily quiet. The ECM gear was silent, not even a sniff. We knew both the target times and targets and as TOT approached all hell broke loose. The ECM came to life. The radios came to life. "Red Crown" came to life with SAM calls and "shotgun" calls from iron hand aircraft. I cannot recall hearing any calls from the B-52 guys. SAMs shooting into the air like Roman Candles. Lots of beepers going off. It was total chaos. Then the bombs starting hitting the targets. It was 4th of July in December. The cloud cover lit up. When the bombs impacted they had the same effect of the 'rabbit' strobe lights you see on a night approach. I thought to myself, it must be terrifying to be on the ground. The light show, the noise and the destruction for miles. It seemed to last no more than 10-15 minutes and then all quiet!



The A-7 guys had 4 shrikes per aircraft and we were launching them trying to keep the enemy radar off line, at least for a few minutes. We were flying in a race track pattern with two iron hand per track on opposite sides. One aircraft always pointing to the target area. Can't recall who my wingman or leader was. Not important. We were basically on a solo mission. I just recall that it was dark, really dark and I was "yanking and banking", and pumping chaff as fast as I could especially when the ECM "launch alert" red light would beep and flash, it got my attention. I'm surprised I was able to get two shrikes off the aircraft. That was just one night....then we had to do it again the next night.

I believe there were four carriers on Yankee Station, but not 100% sure. I do know that we were on a midnight to noon and noon to midnight schedule with the other carriers. Haiphong and Hanoi were being bombed around the clock. Ranger only lost one aircrew. LT. Flip Clark, VA-113, was lost during a daytime mining mission into Haiphong on Christmas eve. Again it was a low overcast day, dreary, with poor visibility. LT. Vic Calise, from VA-25, was 1 min behind Flip on the same run in heading. Vic saw a 'chute', jettisoned his load and tried to keep the chute in sight. No luck. We launched a RESCAP to no avail. I have a patch that says "SAM II Missile Qual'd Hanoi/Haiphong XMAS Blitz 72-73"...I guess it should have said "Linebacker II". We always wondered, who planned this mission...now we know/ I'll never tell!!!

Also from <https://greyeagle1.com/1972/12/linebacker-ii/> posted Jan 10 '19

As a POW in Hanoi, Cdr. Everett Alvarez's account of Linebacker II as written in his book "Chained Eagle."

Unlike previous raids, there was no interval between the siren and the rumble of the incoming B-52's. Everyone scrambled for cover, knocking into each other and cussing in the darkness. There were mixed emotions of euphoria and panic. Only split seconds after the sirens wailed the bombs struck the city, setting off massive explosions, firestorms and reverberating rumbles of shock waves. "Those aren't A-6's! they're B-52's." "Ya-hoo!" With every pause in the night raid, the lights went on again and we came out from under our mahogany planks smiling and upbeat. The succession of bombers continued through most of the night. Hanoi was burning and we still got to see the glow from our open windows. The sky over the capital rained bombs for eleven straight days, with a pause only for Christmas Day. We learned that multiple targets had been hit, including factories, railroad yards, communication links, warehouses, port facilities. Finally! It may have come late in the war but at last the U.S. was playing it right. If we had only done this years before the war might have been all over before the end of the previous decade.



Huey L'Herault :

On December 19, 1972, we were given perhaps the most difficult mission ever flown by A-7's during the Vietnam conflict. Washington wanted to block off the channel going into Haiphong. This was to be done at night, low level, dropping loads of DST's...why there weren't enough A-6's to do this normal type mission I just can't remember. I remember that both us Fists and our sister squadron VA 113 were to do the work. None of us had done any 500', night, RADAR bombing since maybe twice at Fallon over a year ago at Bravo 16 plus the weather was just shit...driving rain at the drop zone. I had to schedule four section for the mission as OPS O so I put Marty Phillips and me as leads of two, I forget who got the third and Ed Greathouse, our CO, insisted on being the other. I was adamant that Ed not get involved, but stay back and monitor everything back on Ranger. Hell,

Ed was the oldest attack CO in the Navy and was certainly not someone to take on this task...but he insisted and off we went into the night. We rendezvoused at a NAV checkpoint over the water and at 2 minute intervals dropped on down and made these suicide runs. Through the rain at 500 ft. everyone that ran the gauntlet got the shit shot all around us...but it was obviously going over our heads. I never looked up from the radar screen or gauges but it was mighty flashy!! Ed was lead of the last section and made his individual run as had the rest of us...except no DST's came off his racks on his run!! He had forgotten to turn on the Master Arm! Anyone else would have just said..."sorry, but I just jettisoned everything off" but not Ed. He went all the way back to the rendezvous point, dove back down with his Master Arm on and did the whole route again!!! Everyone miraculously survived this incredible task...with our CO doing it twice!! It was a night of Distinguished Flying Crosses for some pretty adept aviators flying unpracticed combat tactics under the most adverse of circumstances. How no one crashed or got shot down still boggles my mind to this day.

Don Roesh:

We hauled Ass from as soon as we left Alameda in 1970. I mean the ship was rocking and rolling. The reason was Nixon had decided to start bombing North Vietnam again and the ship wanted to be there but no one told us. Bill Wheat who had just left as the leader of the Blue Angels had picked me as his wingman. Well the Ranger got there in time and I was off on Bill's wing and jinking back and forth as we crossed the beach into North Vietnam covering Bill's six and imagining MiGs coming from every direction. Bill is basically going straight and level as He quickly realized they didn't know we were coming. All of a sudden Bill transmits, "I've got a train a real fucking train and its moving down the tracks. One is in". Well his first bomb hits the cab of the engine and blows it off the tracks. I roll in and hit the cars right behind the engine. Now people are running in every direction and Bill transmits "strafe the bastards they have rifles." That 6000 rds per minute nose mounted beast can put out a lot of lead. When we returned to the ready room and I saw Bill, he said "you will never see a target like that again." And I didn't.



The 72-73 cruise got real exciting when we did the day and night Christmas/New Years bombing of Hanoi. We flew strike missions during the day and Iron hand support for the B-52's at night. Finally the end of combat operations were announced and we not only knew the day the war would end but the time. I with my wingman were assigned the alert five RESCAP on the last day. Had the canopy up taking in some rays when I hear "Launch the alert five" Now I'm thinking this must be a dream as the war is officially over in 35 minutes. Sure enough we blast off and are vectored to a downed F-4 that had been dueling with a 37MM site and had been shot down. By the time we get there the war was officially over. There is AAA and small arms fire as I guess some of the North Vietnamese hadn't gotten the word that this thing is over. I could see where the F-4 had gone down but couldn't make out any shoots and there were no guard transmissions other than those the other rescue planes were making. Stuck around as long as we could dropped all our ordnance and made it back to the ship. I believe that was the last combat mission flown off the Ranger.

Scott Mitchell was the Airwing LSO and not technically a Fist, but flew with them and lived in Lemoore:

FIST vs STINGER EAT OFF (Nov/Dec 1972)

LCDR Marty Phillips was always after ways to improve the morale of the junior officers. One day while in transit between Hawaii and the Tonkin Gulf he had occasion to dine in the dirty shirt mess with Ltjg Rich Fry of the VA-113 Stingers, our sister squadron. Now Rich had tried out for the NFL following college. Needles to say he was a hulking young man. Marty was riveted by the amount of food Rich was able to put away and immediately hit upon the idea of having a contest to see which JO of the two squadrons could eat the most. The Fist put up LT Dave Heaton, a man who could challenge Rich Fry's bulk. The evening of the contest, the forward mess was packed with spectators from both squadrons. Adding additional excitement to the confrontation was the fact that the menu for that evening was Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, gravy and cooked carrots. The contestants were fortunate in that the vegetable was not steamed Brussel sprouts which any survivor will tell you was the vegetable du jour for the entire cruise (rumor had it that Ranger grew Brussel sprouts in the bilges). Salisbury steak was a standard Navy menu item which Marty Phillips had christened "Nairobi Trail Markers" because of their shape and size – resembling road apples from a very healthy horse. Slathered in gravy with a side of mashed potatoes, one serving was more than your typical young man would consume. Both gladiators made it through two portions and when the stewards delivered a third serving, the crowd was going wild. But, alas, about half way through his third trail marker, our man Heaton began to sweat profusely, turned slightly green and excused himself to go to the head. It was over. Rich Fry, Stinger, had not only won the day, but finished up his third helping with gusto. In a culinary footnote; Ranger transited all the way from San Francisco to the Tonkin Gulf serving only Peppermint ice cream in the ward room. You could get it with chocolate sauce if you desired, but no other flavors were available. Some Pork Chop Supply guy had messed up the ice cream order. We had to get to the war zone where the supply ships were adequately provisioned in order to remedy the ice cream crises.

HEADS UP RESCUE (Dec 1972)

Another "Gee Whiz" Marty Phillips story concerns his effecting the rescue of an F-4 crew at night in lousy weather. I was airborne at the same time and witnessed the piss-poor weather conditions. It was low overcast with ragged bottoms of 1000 feet or less. The F-4 crew had been involved in a mid-air while trying to join up with a wingman. The crew of the second aircraft may have been lost at sea – I don't recall. What I do know is that Marty, groping around underneath a ragged sky, at night, over water spotted a survivor in the water and had the presence of mind to mark the location on his inertial navigation system and kept station on that spot while the ship's helo was vectored to him and made a successful pick-up of both crew members. The inertial systems we had in 1972 were crude compared to today's sat-nav systems, but managed wisely it got the job done, saving two lives.

CHRISTMAS BLITZ (Dec 28 1972)

Ranger and the Fist of the Fleet were key players in the Christmas blitz bombing of Hanoi by B-52s. It was this offensive (name escapes me) which finally brought North Vietnam to the negotiating table to seek a compromise. I recall that I was on the first mission of the first night of the strikes, but I may be mistaken. My log book says Dec 28 so if that was not the day of the first strike, then I was second or third???? Anyway the mission was to go up to the Haiphong area and orbit at 20K feet and await the stream of B-52's coming from Guam. I was armed with two AGM-45 Shrike anti-radiation missiles. The idea was to launch the missiles inland when the missile sites lit up to fire at the B-52s. It was a crystal clear night – unusual for that time of year in the Gulf. I was scared stiff because my loitering station was just inside the SAM missile envelope and I could have been a prime target while doing a racetrack pattern in their envelope. Moreover, I had never fired a Shrike before. My earlier wartime experience was with the Walleye and our sister squadron were the Shrike shooters. Anyway, all one had to do was center up the needles receiving the SAM signals. To do this you had to dive down toward the radiation source penetrating the SAM envelope more deeply. With the needles centered, you mashed the bomb pickle and began a loft maneuver and the missile fired away in a blinding flash of rocket exhaust. I could look up and see the B-52s well above me and plowing up the Red River to their target. Once the B-52s were in the area, the entire electronic world lit up and I had no trouble locking onto a target and firing off a shot. I went back out to my station and acquired another SAM site and delivered the second missile. I have no idea whether my launches were effective, but I do know that as I egressed I could see Hanoi light up with missiles and AAA as the B-52s arrived. It was quite a show. The next night I had the LSO duty and was out on the platform all night. You could look up north the see that there was air activity – flashes, streaks, etc. The ship had to have moved North to facilitate recovering our aircraft supporting this Christmas blitz effort.

Dave Heaton was one of the 13 nuggets out of 22 aviators on the cruise:

At the time, I was a Lieutenant on my first cruise because Ranger had been laid up in the yard since before I joined the Fist in June, 1971. Two missions come back to me easily - or, at least the highlights do - some details I cannot confirm but believe are right. On 12/19/72 12 A-7Es - 6 from VA-25 and 6 from VA-113 (Stingers aka Bug Tails) with mining Ha Long Bay, the entrance to Haiphong Harbor. As our squadron Navigation Officers, John "Rip van Winkel - he could sleep anywhere" Kraabel of VA-25 and I planned the specific routes and made kneeboard maps for the aviators (I still have my copy). We were each carrying 10 MK-82 DST 500-lb bombs with mine fuses front and rear. I was wingman to Lt Stu Bugg, a second cruise aviator so I was probably about the 10th A-7E in line. I believe the CO of VA-113 was leading, so they were the first into the attack - all at individual times - followed by the Fisters. We probably started off at about 20,000 feet, started our individual penetrations picking up speed as we descended. In my run, I distinctly remember leveling off at 600MSL below a thin to broken overcast at probably 500+ kts - whatever full throttle would give me. I did a radar update on the left hand point of land in the throat west of the Isle De Cac Ba and picked up the steering commands. As I was approaching this point, I saw AAA fire streaming at me, then falling off behind me. My first taste of AAA got my attention! I pulled the nose up into the cloud layer, but then saw my solution cues tracking down the HUD with the release point rapidly approaching. I rolled to 90 degrees left and kicked in left rudder to get the nose down. As I rolled leveled at about 600MSL my DST's started releasing and I was soon very clean. I went in to a curving right hand level run around the north of the Ile De Cac Ba and the karsts in the light moonlight were beautiful - which I realized much later. Because I had seen a SAM fired at one of the Stingers on his climbout, I started jinking heavily when I started climbing. Making it back to rendezvous, we headed out, trapped and headed below for debrief. John "Rip" Kraabel and I were called to debrief the Admiral (and or/Captain - I can't remember if the Admiral was aboard Ranger), probably to see how two JO's had experienced the mission. I then wrote a 27-page mission debrief to Martha, my wife of less than a year, just to wind down. The mission leader (CO of VA-113?) received a Silver Star and all the rest of us were awarded DFC's.

The SAC B-52's had sustained heavy losses on all but the night of 12/23/72 when they started to change their approaches. On 12/26/72 A-7E's were tasked to provide Iron Hand support to the B-52's who were shifting their attention to the Haiphong area. I launched on LCDR Marty Phillips wing, each of us having 2 Shrike ARM's. Marty and I went to opposite sides of a racetrack pattern at about 20,000 feet east of Haiphong. I received a SAM-Hi signal, turned to put the source on my nose, pulled 15 degrees nose up, closed my eyes and pickled my first Shrike. When I opened my eyes, there was a brilliant flame moving away from me - my Shrike. Soon thereafter I got SAM signals and looked down to see a SAM climbing toward me - and then another coming down at me from above. Following our training - spiced up with a lot of adrenaline - I fought these two with barrel rolls until they passed behind me (I remember at least one explosion). Catching my breath, I called Marty that I was out of 5 for 20 - he said "What the heck are you doing so low?" and I told him "I was fighting SAM's. "Several minutes later I got another good solution on a source, I lined up, pulled nose up, closed my eyes and pickled off my second Shrike. When I opened my

saw a huge "SAM" flame right in front of me so I rolled 180 degrees and pulled for all I could. When I rolled back upright I saw that this SAM was actually my Shrike going away from me - Whew! I later fought another pair of SAM's, joined with Marty and we went back "home" - nothing could look better than the Ranger. I later read that no B-52's were lost that night so it was very satisfying to have played a part in helping to defend them. I received an Individual Air Medal (Bronze Star in lieu of First Award) for this mission. I ended the cruise with 31 combat missions over North Viet Nam, South Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. In early 1974 I returned to civilian life. I enjoyed the challenge of carrier OPS, the adrenaline of combat, but most of all, the camaraderie of my fellow Fisters.



MEET THE "FIST OF THE FLEET" – Deployed to Southeast Asia aboard USS Ranger, members of VA-25, the "Fist of the Fleet" squadron, assembled for this group photo.

Kneeling (left to right) are Lieutenant Vic Calise, Lieutenant Commanders Scott Mitchell and Huey L'Herault, Commander Paul Moore, executive officer; Commander Ed Greathouse, commanding officer; Lieutenant Commanders Marty Phillips and Bob Curtis, Lieutenants Rick Zambori and Don Roesh.

Standing: Ensign Rob Eidemiller, Lieutenant Jim Berry, Lieutenant (jg.) Al Gorthy, Lieutenants Stu Bugg, Mike Morgan, Dave Heaton, Harry Hartsell, Butch Travis and Rusty Thatcher, Lieutenants (jg.) Fred Hines and Dick Mason, Lieutenants Bob Schreiber and Dave Hiland, Lieutenant (jg.) Lee Thomsen, CWO Jerry Burrows.



Skipper Ed Greathouse



NEXT TIME IN GREEN TAILS OVER 'NAM: EPILOGUE