

# THE VIETNAM WAR WITH SPADS

Updated 08/15/2012

The roots of the Vietnam War go back to the French trying to regain control of their colonies after WW-II. What was known as French Indo-China before WW-II included Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

The Viet Minh (communists) formed an independent republic on 6 March 1946, leading to a war with France lasting from 19 December 1946 until 22 July 1954. After the French defeat at Dien Ben Phu, a cease-fire resulted in the Viet Minh withdrawal to the northern zone while South Vietnam became a separate republic on 26 October 1954. The United States trained French pilots and provided military assistance (aircraft, etc.), but our refusal to send troops to help the French retain their colonies was a strain on our relations.

War began between the two republics in 1956, with the United States gradually increasing military assistance to South Vietnam. At the time, the “domino theory” held that communism would sweep throughout Southeast Asia if it wasn’t contained. Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy provided military assistance that increased over the years with little success.

Apparently, nobody read the report on lessons learned at Dien Ben Phu, maybe because it was written in French.

VA-25 had indirect involvement in May 1964 when eleven squadron aircraft were delivered to the South Vietnamese before *MIDWAY* headed home. The next three VA-25 deployments involved combat in SPADs with every increasing NVN anti-aircraft artillery. The other three combat deployments were in A-7s.

Official military participation in the War began on 2 August 1964 when NVN torpedo boats attacked *USS MADDOX (DD-731)*. A similar attack occurred on 4 August, an event some folks claim never happened. President Johnson ordered retaliatory air strikes. From that point, the War grew and was micro-managed from the Whitehouse.

President Johnson refused to run for a second term in 1968 because of the War and ordered a bombing halt in November 1968. Later, Secretary of Defense McNamara admitted he knew the war couldn’t be won but let it drag on anyway.

Richard Nixon became President in 1969, when there were 543,000 American troops in Vietnam. By 1971, Nixon had withdrawn all but 157,000 troops, expecting the South Vietnamese to take greater responsibility for their fate, but with no progress at the peace table,

Nixon ordered the North Vietnam harbors mined and Hanoi bombed by B-52s, and VA-25 was there. In January 1973 the North Vietnamese finally agreed to a peace treaty and return of the POWs. Our remaining forces were withdrawn from Vietnam, but then North Vietnam attacked in force in March 1975 and soon occupied Saigon.

The War was officially over on 29 April 1975, but the misery was not. The tragedy for families of 58,000 dead Americans and countless thousands of Vietnamese can never be measured.

For other reasons, Nixon was forced to resign in August 1974. The fall of Saigon was actually on Gerald Ford’s watch. At least he refused to provide the reparations promised the North Vietnamese in the treaty.





## CHRONOLOGY

**1965**

**Commander in Chief = Lyndon B. Johnson**

- 27 January The squadron was back aboard *MIDWAY* for a WEPTRAEX off the coast of Southern California. LT D. B. DIXON became a *MIDWAY* Centurion. The squadron returned to NAS Lemoore on February 5.
- 7 February *USS RANGER (CVA-61)*, *USS CORAL SEA (CVA-43)*, and *HANCOCK (CVA-19)* conducted air strikes against barracks and staging areas near Dong Hoi. This strike was in retaliation for a damaging Viet Cong attack on installations around Pleiku.
- 23 February VA-25 flew aboard *USS MIDWAY* to take part in Operation SILVER LANCE, a simulated invasion of the Southern California coast. VA-25's portion of the exercise was primarily to soften up the area prior to an amphibious assault. During this period, the squadron flew one hundred and fourteen sorties, logging three hundred sixty-seven hours in the air. We added LT J. C. BEAM and Ltjg G. M. STOVER to the list of double centurions. Also, LT D. B. DIXON made the 128,000th landing aboard *MIDWAY* on March 3.
- 6 March *MIDWAY*, with CVW-2 embarked, departed for the Western Pacific area for the squadron's twelfth WestPac deployment. During this cruise visits were planned for Australia and the Indian Ocean. However, the Vietnamese crisis made these visits seem doubtful, and it was not long before the news came that our schedule had been significantly altered.
- 10/11 March The squadron flew long-range and medium range practice strikes to Hawaii, simulating delivery of nuclear weapons. Sandwiched between two weekends in Pearl Harbor the squadron, along with *MIDWAY* and CVW-2, underwent an Operational Readiness Inspection 15 to 18 March 1965. VA-25 received a grade of EXCELLENT on this inspection.
- 22 March *MIDWAY* sailed for Subic Bay, P.I.
- 3 April The squadron flew to NAS Cubi Point and *MIDWAY* arrived the following day. The next few days were spent flying coordinated strikes against Scarborough Shoals, West of Luzon, and FMLP.
- 8 April *MIDWAY* departed Subic Bay and the squadron flew aboard the following day.



- 10 April *MIDWAY* arrived in the Gulf of Tonkin and the squadron flew several SAR and RESCAP mission the next few days.
- 12 April A flight of four SPADs, led by LCDR GRAY, with LCDR BACON, Ltjg WOODBURY and Ltjg HINSBERGER, flew a RESCAP mission into Laos, becoming the first aircraft from *MIDWAY* to engage the enemy in battle. An almost daily diet of RESCAP flights as well as night and day road reconnaissance missions into North Vietnam and the surrounding area followed.
- 15 April The squadron took part in saturation bombing against a Viet Cong stronghold in western South Vietnam (Black Virgin Mountain), joining with planes from other carriers and Air Force land bases.

- 16 April A flight led by CDR Ralph SMITH, attacked and destroyed the Bai Doc Thou highway bridge in North Vietnam.
- 17 April Ltjg LAACK returned from an escort mission with a bullet hole in his aircraft's horizontal stabilizer becoming the first in the squadron to prove, "Those guys are shooting back over there."
- 18 April Easter Sunday was cursed (or blessed) with bad weather which canceled all daytime flights. However, the night road reconnaissance mission did get off and struck a gold mine. LCDR GRAY and Ltjg WOODBURY found a long convoy of enemy trucks on a road just southwest of Vinh in North Vietnam. After making several runs, they flashed a contact report back to the *MIDWAY*. The entire Air Wing was launched to finish off the convoy in strikes that carried through the night and into the next morning.
- 19 April CDR SMITH led VA-25 aircraft for a seeding mission on several road choke points. For the next few days the air battle consisted mainly of road reconnaissance and RESCAP missions.

Seeding missions involved dropping 500-lb bombs equipped with anti-withdrawal fuses along roads or construction sites. These bombs buried themselves and detonated on passing vehicles or with random time delay.

- 21 April Pilots flying their nightly rounds thought they had picked up signals from LT PHIL BUTLER of VA-22, who had been shot down the previous night. This was later confirmed with other air wing pilots talking to him on the radio. However, after evading for about three days, LT BUTLER was unfortunately captured by the North Vietnamese before he could be rescued.

Lt. Butler was one of the returnees in February 1973, after 94 months as a POW, two months shy of eight years.

- 22 April Shortly after midnight, LCDR GRAY and Ltjg WOODBURY again spotted a fifteen to twenty truck convoy, this time northwest of Vinh. They attacked it successfully and relayed the news to *MIDWAY*. Once more many other Air Wing aircraft were launched to finish the job.
- 23 April VA-25 participated in coordinated strikes with the rest of the Air Wing against several bridges just west of Vinh in an attempt to cut communist logistic and communications routes.
- 28 April VAW-13 DETACHMENT ONE found several P.T. boats in a North Vietnamese river. VA-25 SPADS were called into action once more. LT JUAN and LT JOHNSON were the first on the scene and attacked until fuel requirements dictated their return to *MIDWAY*. Shortly thereafter, CDR ETTINGER, LT LAACK and LT SCOGGIN arrived to continue the attack with napalm, thus marking the first time napalm had been used from the deck of *MIDWAY* since joining YANKEE TEAM. The daily tally sheet for this engagement showed three P.T. boats sunk, with all aircraft returning safely.
- 1 May The squadron took part in saturation bombing of a Viet Cong stronghold southwest of Saigon. The next two days were spent bombing in the Mekong Delta with the aid of a USAF airborne forward air controller. For the next few days the flying was relatively uneventful as we continued our RESCAP missions, close air support in the Mekong Delta and the reconnoitering and seeding of roads.
- 7 May VA-25 stood overhead to support the Marines amphibious landing on the coast of South Vietnam at Chu Lai, 50 miles south of Danang. On the dawn launch, ENS LIVESAY flew off VA-25's one-millionth pound of ordnance since its arrival in the combat area 28 days earlier. The next day we were again on station as the Marines continued to bring supplies ashore at Chu Lai and as the Seabees began construction of the new airfield there. In the afternoon CDR SMITH and Ltjg WALMAN made a strike on Dong Thanh supply depot. Meeting no opposition, they made a total of 29 bombing runs between them to leave the large complex 50% destroyed.
- 10 May *MIDWAY* departed the Gulf of Tonkin for a much needed rest at Subic Bay. The following day all aircraft flew into NAS Cubi Point, with *MIDWAY* arriving a day later. An "All Hands" party was held on the beach on the 15th. However, it was soon time to get underway again and the squadron birds were flown back aboard on May 19.
- 20 May Back on YANKEE STATION, eight of our SPADs attacked the harbor at Vinh, led by CDR SMITH. There they encountered heavy flak but still inflicted 80% damage to the target. All planes returned safely to *MIDWAY*. Once more the squadron conducted semi-regular road reconnaissance, road cutting, RESCAP missions, and anti-P.T. boat coastal patrols. The next two days were spent seeding Mugia Pass, choke points on enemy supply routes, and searching for P.T. boats and enemy truck convoys.
- 24 May **CDR HARRY E. ETTINGER** relieved CDR Ralph F. SMITH as Commanding Officer.



- 25 May The squadron attacked another truck convoy in North Vietnam in the early morning and attacked successfully. Later that afternoon eight squadron aircraft struck a military barracks in North Vietnam. They encountered moderate flak which was very professionally and completely silenced by the flak suppression F-8's from VF-111. In all, the SPADs made 56 runs and left the targets in the area nearly demolished.
- May LCDR FORD, leading a strike against the Phu Ban Supply Depot in North Vietnam, left it in ruins. A PT boat was found and sunk in a river of North Vietnam. The week was closed out with armed reconnaissance missions and then the monsoon season began in earnest by observing a day of holiday routine.
- 30 May Eight SPADs were launched in terrible weather to strike a key bridge on Route One, North of Thanh Hoa. The results left something to be desired with one section returning to *MIDWAY* with a rough-running engine; another section landed aboard *USS BON HOMME RICHARD (CVA-31)* because of a sump light; and the remaining four planes were eventually recalled due to the extremely poor weather. It was probably just as well, since MiGs had been reported airborne and tracked as far south as Vinh.
- 1/2 June The P.T. boat killers were again on the prowl, sinking four in the morning. An afternoon flight led by LCDR BACON sank three in a river between Vinh and Dong Hoi. The next day on a strike against a bridge near Mugia Pass, LT. SCOGGIN dropped a span, while other aircraft made several road cuts.
- 4/5 June The Air Wing's primary concern and major flying efforts were directed toward RESCAP of one of our own downed pilots, LT PAUL ILG of VA-22, who had ejected from his crippled A-4 Skyhawk on the 3rd. VA-25 flew many long hours of RESCAP missions over the area trying to pinpoint LT ILG's position. Radio contact had been made with him, but because of moderate flake in the area, rescue helicopters could not approach close enough to affect a rescue. While searching for LT ILG on June 4, LT FRECKMAN experienced serious engine trouble which necessitated his diverting to the emergency field at Udorn, Thailand. The end result was an engine change for his aircraft. On the 5th, VA-25 took on the task of communications relay while the rescue efforts continued. To the elation of all concerned, particularly LT ILG, a successful pickup was made near the end of that day.
- LT ILG had ejected into the middle of several NVN flak sites. He had to evade outside this area before pickup was possible.
- 9 June LT J. M. SCOGGIN made his 300th landing aboard *MIDWAY* to become the VA-25's first triple centurion and a member of the very exclusive "300 Club" aboard *MIDWAY*.
- 10 June Though starting as many other days with night road reconnaissance and RESCAP missions, a mid-morning strike of eight squadron planes was led by CDR STODDARD. Despite the continuation of extremely adverse weather conditions, all aircraft successfully punched through and located the target site, the Co Dinh thermoelectric plant eight miles southwest of Thanh Hoa. Although rain showers, 4000-5000 foot ceilings, heavy cloud cover and reduced visibility existed in the target area, each aircraft made two runs by sections on the power plants. Ltjg LYNNE scored a direct hit on a primary part of the complex with a 2000 lb bomb completely destroying the building. Flak from automatic fire was moderate, and as the last aircraft were pulling off target, CDR STODDARD observed an explosion on a nearby hillside.
- A radio check revealed Ltjg C. L. DOUGHTIE, flying Canasta 578, was missing. CDR STODDARD and his wingman made several passes over the crash scene to no avail. LTJG DOUGHTIE who had just joined the squadron on May 25 was on his 8th mission, our first combat loss in Vietnam. He was declared KIA.
- 11 June Weather reconnaissance and RESCAP missions were scheduled. While returning from one of these, Ltjg C. W. HARTMAN had the distinction of making the 25,000th carrier controlled approach (CCA) aboard *MIDWAY*.
- 15 June Ltjg ABRAHAMSEN dropped a bridge in North Vietnam that had eluded the squadron for two days. LT. M. H. DRAPER made his 200th *MIDWAY* landing on returning from the strike.
- 16 June The squadron launched a strike of eight planes against the Yon Phu barracks on the coast of North Vietnam. No enemy ground fire was observed as the aircraft made seven runs each for a total of 56 runs.
- 17 June Another truck convoy was spotted, attacked, and heavily damaged. The remainder of the week was taken up by RESCAP, road cuts, and armed reconnaissance.

CDR LOUIS PAGE and LT JACK BATSON, of VF-21 (F-4B squadron) were each credited with a MiG shoot-down,

20 June

A few RESCAPs were scheduled, but in general it appeared to be a day of relatively light flight operations. In the late afternoon LCDR GREATHOUSE, Ltjg LYNNE, LT JOHNSON, and Ltjg HARTMAN, were assigned to a special request from the 2nd Air Div., Saigon, for a RESCAP mission into the interior of North Vietnam. About 50 miles northwest of Thanh Hea, the four SPADS were jumped by two communist MiG-17 fighters. As the MiG's made repeated attacks, the four Skyraiders dove for the deck jettisoning their external tanks and ordnance on the way down. After several passes one MiG broke off from the flight, but the other continued to hassle with the SPADS right down to treetop level. Around and around in tight defensive weaves and circles went the sections of SPADS with the MiG fighter breaking in and out through the middle until finally the second section of LT JOHNSON and Ltjg HARTMAN were in position to bring their 20mm guns to bear. It was scratch one MiG which was observed to roll into a nose down turn at about 700 feet altitude and crash into a 500 foot ridgeline. (See PEOPLE and EVENTS "SKYRAIDER VS MIG-17" for more details of this flight.)



MiG-17 "Fresco"

21 June

The "MiG KILLERS FOUR" were promptly dispatched to Saigon to meet the press. South Vietnam's new Premier, Air Vice Marshall Ky, (who was a USN trained "SPAD" pilot) personally made them unofficial members of the Vietnamese Air Force, giving each a set of Vietnamese Air Force Wings and decorating all with the AIR FORCE GALLANTRY MEDAL, the highest decoration awarded by the South Vietnamese government to aviators (at that time).



Briefing Admiral Bringle (seated). L. to R. Unk staff – Ltjg Hartman – LCDR Greathouse – Unk staff – Lt Johnson – Ltjg Lynne – CDR Ettinger

Admiral William F. "Bush" BRINGLE (NA 1937) was skipper of VOF-1 (later VOC-1) during WW-II. His squadron flew F6F Hellcats from *USS TULAGI* (CVE-72) during the Invasion of Southern France in August 1944, then was equipped with FM-2 Wilder Wildcats for Pacific operations from "jeep" carriers over Luzon, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa during 1945. His squadron shot-down 20 Japanese aircraft while flying mostly gunfire spotting missions. He also served as CVG-17 from October 1945 to September 1946 (VT-17).

23 June

CDR ETTINGER flew VA-25's two millionth pound of ordnance from the deck of *MIDWAY* in this Southeast Asian operation as around the clock operations continued. During afternoon ceremonies, VADM BLACKBURN, USN COMSEVENTHFLT, presented LCDR GREATHOUSE and Ltjg LYNNE with the Distinguished Flying Cross for their part in the MiG encounter. LT JOHNSON and Ltjg HARTMAN were each credited with a half-kill on the downed MiG and were awarded the Silver Star for their outstanding achievement.

24 June

A strike and road reconnaissance mission led by LCDR GREATHOUSE downed its primary target bridge, damaged two more bridges as well as ferry boats, in efforts to continue thwarting the enemy's lines of supply. Ltjg HINGSBERGER made his 200th *MIDWAY* landing to become a double Centurion. LCDR R. L. BACON experienced a sump warning light while 26 miles from the ship. He attempted a straight-in approach, but the engine failed

on final. A good ditching prevented injury to him, and he was promptly plucked from the water by the on-station helo. LCDR BACON was back aboard *MIDWAY* in less than 3 minutes after his aircraft entered the water. Nonetheless it was another aircraft scratched from the fast dwindling inventory of SPADs and evoked the following comment in the LSO book on LCDR BACON's pass; "Not enough power - little too early land."

- 27 June LCDR BACON and Ltjg HINGSBURGER struck and destroyed a barracks building and compound area about 15 miles northwest of Vinh. During the ensuing road reconnaissance LCDR FORD and ENS LIVESAY made a very effective road cut by sliding a mountainside down across the road into the river below with their bomb load. Returning over the coast, they utilized their remaining ordnance to damage seven barges.
- 28 June *MIDWAY* departed Yankee Station enroute to Yokosuka, Japan. The Air Wing flew off to NAS Atsugi on July 1, with VA-25 contributing five planes to the fly away. The next day *MIDWAY* arrived in Yokosuka.
- 17 July *MIDWAY* departed Japan and headed back to the Gulf of Tonkin. The next three days the squadron participated in exercises to test the early warning capability of Okinawa and Taiwan and prepared to re-enter combat by bombing the spar and practicing day and night tactics.
- 21/22 July *MIDWAY* operated in the area of Pratas reef, about 135 miles southeast of Hong Kong, aiding the disable destroyer *USS Frank Knox*, which had run aground there.
- 23 July VA-25 took part in road reconnaissance and communications relay missions. Particularly effective was one four-plane armed reconnaissance mission on which Ltjg DARAMUS, flying his first actual combat mission, destroyed one North Vietnamese bridge. Ltjg HARTMAN, by now a combat veteran, destroyed two more; and LT. LAACK, also an old hand, dropped still another. On their return to *MIDWAY*, LT LAACK also made his 200th landing aboard.



Loading bombs on outer wing racks usually required spreading the wings

- July The rest of the month the squadron was mainly employed in the role of armed reconnaissance while a few communications relay missions were flown. Many of the missions during this period were hampered by poor weather; those that did get in dropped a few secondary bridges and cut some roads.
- 27 July LCDR GREATHOUSE and ENS LIVESAY, on RESCAP station with the HU-16 in the Gulf of Tonkin, were called away to aid in the rescue operations for a downed Air Force pilot just 25 miles northwest of Hanoi. They went in, located the downed flyer, and remained in the area until a friendly helicopter approached the area. They guided the helo in and provided aerial cover while the pickup was made, then binged to Danang AFB, landing 10.7 hours after take-off. (See PEOPLE and EVENTS "RESCAP 101" for details of this story.)
- 28 July One of our flak suppression aircraft was hit over North Vietnam near the Laotian border. Ltjg GRANT TOWNSEND, of VA-23, flying an A-4E was hit and was forced to eject. The SPADs, led by CDR ETTINGER, then turned their efforts to rescue and made strafing runs on Communist troops which were trying to capture the downed pilot. The remaining SPADs in the flight escorted a helicopter in to make the pickup and acted as communications coordinator. Later, LT DRAPER and Ltjg WOODBURY were returning to *MIDWAY* just after sunset from their RESCAP station with the HU-16. They were called upon to aid in the rescue of two VF-21 officers who had ejected from their F-4 Phantom just 25 miles from *MIDWAY*. They located the downed flyers in the water and remained overhead waiting *MIDWAY*'s helicopter pickup.
- 1 August The squadron flew night road reconnaissance as well as RESCAP while carrying out constant surveillance of enemy communications and supply lines. During this period CDR ETTINGER and Ltjg ABRAHAMSEN became double Centurions aboard *MIDWAY*. LCDR FORD took a 37 millimeter hit in his left wing while flying about 45 miles southwest of Vinh. He made it back aboard *MIDWAY* with a hole about three feet in diameter in the outer wing.





Red-shirt arms 250-lb bombs on the flight deck. Two 20mm cannon are above the Red-Shirt and cockpit bolt-on armor is behind the Brown-Shirt.

- 4/5 August VA-25 aircraft struck supply caves in the hills west of Quang Khe, inflicting minor damage, before breaking up into sections for reconnaissance work.
- 6 August Early in the morning, one of our night reconnaissance flights discovered and successfully attacked a North Vietnamese truck convoy, destroying three trucks and damaging seven. Later in the day we flew an eight plane strike against targets deep in MiG country about 100 miles West of Hanoi.
- 7 August CDR ETTINGER led an eight plane strike against military targets a little east of Dien Bien Phu in Communist North Vietnam. Due to adverse weather, the strike was canceled while the SPADs were enroute. They diverted to the alternate target, the Dong Hoi Citadel. Fifty percent damage was inflicted on the Citadel, and anti-aircraft fire seemed light although two of the attacking jet aircraft received minor hits.
- LCDR H. E. GRAY, JR., was apparently hit on his second run on the target, and his aircraft crashed into the target area. He was presumed to have been killed as no parachute was observed. *MIDWAY* held memorial services three days later. Thus VA-25 lost its second pilot over North Vietnam inside of two months.
- August In the next few days the target near Dien Bien Phu was successfully struck and the Dong Hoi Citadel was struck again. Rescues and road reconnaissance closed out our action in the North for a while.
- 13 August *MIDWAY* moved south once again to take up the fight against the Viet Cong in the Mekong Delta and inland South Vietnam. We flew in close support of friendly troops as directed by airborne forward air controllers. Much of the results of these missions were obscured by the dense jungle below, but the one who could tell said we were very effective. VA-25 SPADs ranged from the east central coast of South Vietnam to the southwest tip of the Mekong Delta and the edge of the Gulf of Siam. It was a welcome change to get away from the heavy and widely scattered flak up North. It was on this trip down South that VA-25 got its first confirmed water buffalo kills.
- 22 August ENSIGN LIVESAY brought his disabled aircraft back from the coast 130 miles to the *MIDWAY* to make a safe landing, but trailed smoke; his troubles stemmed from an engine malfunction rather than enemy action.
- 23 August *MIDWAY* moved back up North for two days to relieve the disabled *USS CORAL SEA (CVA-43)*. During this period several Air Wing planes were lost as armed reconnaissance missions searched for communist SAM sites in North Vietnam. VA-25 took part in RESCAP missions for the downed aviators.
- 25 August *MIDWAY* headed for some well-deserved liberty in Subic Bay.
- 1 September The Navy is authorized additional pay for flight deck personnel in the hazardous environment of flight operations.
- 3 September *MIDWAY* was underway for Hong Kong. The Air Wing flew aboard the same day through bad weather. The next day *MIDWAY* bucked the force of a tropical typhoon enroute, and finally arrived in Hong Kong on the 6th. For five days everyone aboard took advantage of the liberty offered by this British colony
- 10 September *MIDWAY* departed Hong Kong for another stint on Yankee Station. Enroute, we bombed the spar to sharpen our eyes.

- 12 September The squadron entered combat once more. For the first week there were only fourteen pilots in the squadron available to fly, and it was a busy time for them. There was a steady diet of RESCAP and armed reconnaissance missions both day and night. The Vietnamese area was undergoing the transition from the Southwest monsoon to the Northeast monsoon, and the weather was seldom conducive to the completion of our reconnaissance missions.
- 16 September An Awards Ceremony was held on the hanger deck in which many members of VA-25 received medals and honors during the previous at sea periods. That same afternoon, on a RESCAP mission over North Vietnam, CDR STODDARD's aircraft was hit in the cockpit area by enemy fire. He received multiple superficial wounds and the aircraft was extensively damaged, but he made it to Danang where he made a successful gear up landing.
- 20 September During a large scale strike against a target in North Vietnam, close to Haiphong, an A-4 Skyhawk was shot down. CDR ETTINGER and Ltjg WOODBURY, located the downed pilot and guided *MIDWAY*'s helicopter over land to make the pickup. They experienced heavy enemy ground fire, but the operation was a complete success. Others from VA-25 attacked Tiger Island one more time the same day.
- 24 September LT LAACK and Ltjg LYNNE, on another RESCAP mission, played a vital role in the successful pickup of an Air Force pilot who had ejected from his jet fighter between Tiger Island and the heavily defended coast of North Vietnam. As the HU-16 amphibious rescue aircraft approached the vicinity, it came under heavy fire from several guns on the mainland. LT LAACK's flight attacked the gun positions with all its available ordnance, silencing some positions and sufficiently decreasing the enemy firepower to allow the HU-16 to land and picked up the pilot in the water.
- 27 September VA-25s four-millionth pound of ordnance was delivered on the enemy in an armed reconnaissance mission. The next day LCDR GREATHOUSE led a flight of four that totally demolished an enemy bridge on a strike prior to their road reconnaissance.
- 30 September *MIDWAY* headed south for change of scenery down on "DIXIE Station". At dawn two four-plane flights led by CDR STODDARD and LCDR FORD were launched on a strike against a Viet Cong Training Area near the coast of South Vietnam. The ship was near the coast and without losing sight of *MIDWAY* the two flights destroyed forty-two buildings and damaged ten more in the target area. The forward air controller was very pleased as the SPADs made run after run dropping explosives and napalm into the dense foliage hiding many of the buildings from sight.
- 6 October LT F. H. FRECKMANN became a *MIDWAY* CENTURION when he made his 100th landing aboard after returning from a combat mission. Two days later *MIDWAY* left Dixie station for a one-week visit to Subic Bay before returning to Dixie Station.
- 19 October For the first three or four days the squadron flew close air support for the South Vietnamese special forces camp at Plei Me, near the border in central South Vietnam. The camp was under siege by the Viet Cong and had been for several days. It was literally fighting for its life. The afternoon of 20th, a flight of four SPADs, led by LT MADSEN and including CDR STODDARD, LT JOHNSON, and Ltjg DRAMUS provided close air support in conjunction with other aircraft from CVW-2 and the Air Force for the valiant defenders. The A-1s bombed, strafed, and dropped napalm to break a VC suicide charge at the very perimeter of the camp. Although this was not the end of the VC bid to capture Plei Me, it has since been said by the survivors, "That without the accurate air support in those first few critical hours, Plei Me would have undoubtedly been captured by the Viet Cong." Once more "the Fist of the Fleet" had struck a mighty blow against the Communist of Southeast Asia.
- 23 October A three-plane flight of VA-25's A-1's under the leadership of CDR ETTINGER bombed along a road 30 miles south to clear the area for friendly troops' passage. When the friendlies arrived, they found 102 Viet Cong killed by the air attack. This flight also delivered our five-millionth pound of ordnance on the enemy.
- 27 October CDR ETTINGER led a flight of four into the Saigon area and at the direction of an airborne forward controller, bombed a Viet Cong village leaving 22 buildings destroyed and the town in flames.
- 30 October Forty miles north of Nha Trang while leading a flight of three A1's, CDR ETTINGER attacked a VC concentration and left 23 buildings destroyed and numerous others damaged. Five miles to the east LCDR FORD led a flight of four A1's onto a VC village which accounted for 33 more buildings destroyed. The significance of these two flights is that a total of 56 buildings were destroyed with 56 bombs.
- 3 November About an hour after sunrise, as the squadron aircraft were being prepared for the early morning launch, one of the plane captains, AIRMAN EDDIE BILLUPS, Jr., fell from the



flight deck into the sea. A search for him was conducted until noon at which time it was presumed that he had drowned.

4 November CDR STODDARD carried off the six-millionth pound of ordnance delivered by VA-25 against the enemy during the cruise. This particular piece of ordnance happened to be a porcelain privy, complete with box fins and a nose fuse. It is felt that nothing more need be said about this strike except that it was highly successful. (Pictures of this event are on the Internet. Search: Stoddard.)

During this last at-sea period CDR BACON, LT JOHNSON, Ltjg HARTMAN, Ltjg WALMAN, and ENS LIVESAY became *MIDWAY* Centurions. Double Centurions were CDR ETTINGER, LCDR GREATHOUSE, LCDR FORD, LT LAACK, LT ABRAHAMSEN, and Ltjg HINGSBERGER.

LT Dave ABRAHAMSEN was later killed in a Training Command accident, details are still unknown.

6 November *MIDWAY* arrived in Subic Bay one last time before heading for home. Many took advantage of this last minute opportunity to do some overseas shopping.

12 November A memorial service for AIRMAN EDDIE BILLUPS, Jr. was conducted on the hanger deck. That same day there was a final Awards Ceremony for the Air Wing in which squadron pilots added to their collection of air medals.

23 November *MIDWAY* arrived at Alameda. The squadron's SPADs were flown ashore to NAS LEMOORE. COMNAVAIRPAC, Vice Admiral CONNOLLY, was on hand to personally welcome the returning warriors of VA-25. It was a fine gesture by the Admiral, but to make a gross understatement, "the pilots were more impressed by the sight of their wives and families." It was a joyously tearful reunion with the Hanford High School Band providing colorful background music and the local TV and news media recording the highlights. Coverage of the homecoming was shown on nationwide TV (NBC's Huntley-Brinkley TV News Program.)

Immediately following the 1965 cruise, *MIDWAY* entered Hunters Point Shipyard for extensive modifications, including a larger flight deck. She would be delayed in the Yard by lack of funds which were diverted to repair three ships damaged by major fires (*ORISKANY*, *FORRESTAL*, and *ENTERPRISE*).

2 December USS ENTERPRISE (CVAN 65) deployed to the western Pacific with the largest Air Wing (CVW-9), including four attack squadrons (all A-4s) instead of the usual three.

28 December CDR WILLIAM H. HARRIS relieved CDR R. E. MOORE as CVW-Two.

## **1966 Commander in Chief = Lyndon B. Johnson**

January The training cycle began again in earnest.

February VA-25 worked with *USS CONSTELLATION (CVA-64)*, one of the Navy's newest and largest flattops, during her shakedown cruise after an extensive six months overhaul and refurbishing.

15/16 Feb COMFAIRALAMEDA conducted the squadron's annual Administrative/Material Inspection. A highly respectable grade of 92.54 of Excellent was assigned as All Hands worked very hard in maintaining VA-25's traditional high standards of excellence.

February The squadron held an All Hands party in order to celebrate the successful cruise with the families and friends. It was truly an outstanding party. It was held at the air station's CPO Club featuring a delicious buffet supper with live music and dancing and plenty of liquid refreshments. "A good time was had by all."

5 March A Personnel Inspection was held in conjunction with an Awards Ceremony and Open House, in which many of the officers and men received final decorations for their outstanding performance during the past cruise. Fifteen officers and twelve enlisted men received awards. Among the awards given to the officers were two Distinguished Flying Crosses, twelve Air Medals, thirteen Navy Commendation Medals, two Secretary of the Navy Commendations for Achievement and one Purple Heart. The enlisted men received nine Good Conduct Medals and one Navy Commendation for Achievement Award.

25 March The squadron conducted a Special Awards Ceremony in tribute to a former squadron mate, LCDR HAROLD E. GRAY, Jr., who lost his life on a combat mission over North Vietnam on 7 July 1965. His widow, Mrs. CAROLYN GRAY of Columbus, Georgia, along with LCDR GRAY's parents and members of his immediate family attended the ceremony. CDR ETTINGER made posthumous presentations to Mrs. GRAY of the Distinguished Flying

Cross with a Gold Star in lieu of a second DFC, an Air Medal with Gold Stars in lieu of Second, Third and Fourth Air Medals and one Purple Heart.

- 2 April ENSIGN JAMES H. SINGLETERRY was killed in an automobile accident. ENSIGN SINGLETERRY had joined the squadron in October 1965 and had served as Avionics/Weapons Officer since that time. He was highly respected by All Hands and was truly an outstanding Naval Officer.
- 12 April CAPTAIN BOYDSTUN, Commanding Officer of NAS LEMOORE, presented the "Golden Mule" to the squadron. The "Golden Mule" is symbolic of excellence in safety concerning the operation of ground support equipment (yellow-vehicles) at NAS LEMOORE. Seldom is this award achieved by any of the fleet units at NAS LEMOORE as the RAG squadrons almost always win the award.
- 13 April **CDR C. WILLIAM STODDARD** relieved CDR H. E. ETTINGER as Commanding Officer.
- 18 April Ex-Fist pilot LT A. D. WILSON, flying with VA-52, was shot down, but rescued near Tiger Island.
- April/May The squadron shifted its base of operations to NAAS FALLON for an intensified three weeks of training in conventional weapons delivery techniques. High winds at the time played havoc with the efforts of the pilots to achieve their "E's" during the graded COMPEX.
- May The squadron took its first look at our new home, *CORAL SEA* with day and night carrier qualifications while the nucleus of the squadron remained at LEMOORE.

Actually, the squadron became a *CORAL SEA* Plank owner on 21 September 1947. The squadron was then called VA-6B and flew spanking-new AD-1 Skyraiders on her maiden voyage.

- 13 June The squadron departed NAS LEMOORE and embarked in *CORAL SEA*, operating out of Alameda with CVW-2. The ship and Air Wing participated in a WEPTRAEX off the Southern California coast until the end of June.
- 16 June Aircraft from *USS HANCOCK (CVA-19)* strike petroleum facilities in an area 24 miles west of Thanh Hoa.
- 1 July Three North Vietnamese torpedo boats attack two destroyers operating 40 miles offshore. Aircraft from *USS HANCOCK and USS CONSTELLATION (CVA-64)* made short work of the boats. One destroyer pulled 19 survivors from the water.
- 2 July VA-25 dependents enjoyed a day at sea during *CORAL SEA*'s Dependents day cruise. Sample flight operations were conducted demonstrating vividly exactly what husbands, sons, and fathers really do on an operational deployment.
- July *CORAL SEA* conducted various exercises including Operation Belaying Pin which simulated the tactical environment anticipated in Vietnam combat operations. The Chocolate Mountain and Twenty Nine Palms target complexes were utilized for this evolution.
- The grade assigned for VA-25's part in the Operational Readiness Exercise was 94, or Excellent. The exercise was the final segment of warm-up exercises prior to the forthcoming WESTPAC cruise.
- 29 July *CORAL SEA* got underway for its Thirteenth Westpac commitment. A good part of the crew took a final look at the San Francisco skyline as *CORAL SEA* passed beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. A course was set for Hawaiian waters and all hands made final preparations for the forthcoming Operational Readiness Inspection.
- 2 August The ORI began and continued for five days during which VA-25 scored 94.49 points, the highest grade assigned to any CVW-2 squadron. Two days of liberty, interspersed during this period, provided time for visits to Honolulu and Waikiki
- 6 August *Coral Sea* began the last leg of its journey to the Far East. Stops were made at Naval Station Yokosuka where exchange briefings with *USS RANGER (CVA-61)* were held
- 26 August After more briefings at Subic Bay, *CORAL SEA* departed for Yankee Station in the South China Sea. However, during night flying operations, *CORAL SEA* suffered an engineering casualty. A blade from one of the ship's screws tore from its mountings and impacted on the shaft of the adjacent propeller. Major repairs were required and after a stop that night at Subic Bay, the ship returned to Yokosuka, while the Air Wing deployed to NAS Atsugi.
- 8 September *CORAL SEA* departed Yokosuka and arrived on Yankee Station five days later.

- 13 September The squadron launched the first combat sortie of the deployment.
- 14 September CDR C. WILLIAM STODDARD was shot down and killed a few miles off the coast of Vinh, a heavily defended city in central North Vietnam. He had been on an Armed Reconnaissance mission. The Executive Officer, **CDR JAMES BURDEN**, immediately assumed command with no letup in the pace of operations.

CDR Stoddard (NA 1949) was from Atlanta, Georgia. A memorial for him at 400 Colony Square can be viewed on the Internet.

September Squadron pilots were assigned two primary missions against the North Vietnamese — Rescue Air Patrol (RESCAP) and Armed Reconnaissance (RECCE). On RECCE missions our A-1's attacked highway and railroad bridges, supply areas, barges and fleeting targets such as truck convoys. Except for infrequent weather divert flights into Laos pilots centralized their strikes in central North Vietnam in the areas encompassing highways 1A, 15 and 115. Supply-carrying barges and motorized junks spotted along the coastal waterways were essential targets and were hit on an almost daily basis.

September During this first period on Yankee Station CDR BURDEN logged CORAL SEA's 159,000th landing.

8 October Ex-FIST pilot LT JOHN A. FELDHAUS, flying with VA-152 aboard *ORISKANY*, was shot down over NVN and listed as MIA. His status was changed to KIA on 31 October 1977. His remains were found and identified in October 2001 and he was buried at Arlington on 20 November 2001.

12 October LT DEANE WOODS was hit by enemy ground fire during a RECCE mission about twenty five miles inland from the coast near Hong Me Island. He bailed out of his stricken aircraft and landed on a hill beneath a thick jungle canopy.

Concentrated rescue efforts during the next several days failed as enemy troops closed in on the downed pilot and helicopters were unable to pluck LT WOODS from danger. Twice the downed aviator valiantly ordered the squadron's A-1's and the rescue helicopter to depart the scene because of the proximity of well-armed enemy troops who could have endangered the aircraft. With his radio now dead and his signal flares depleted the SAR (Search and Rescue) effort was reluctantly but necessarily terminated.

It has since been learned that LT WOODS was a captive of the North Vietnamese. He has written his family to let them know that he is in good health and is being well treated.

LT DEANE WOODS was returned from captivity in March 1973 during the release of prisoners. He spent 77 months in prison camp.

19 October After 36 days on station, *CORAL SEA* departed for a rest period in Subic Bay. The welcome change of pace there was concluded after nine days when *CORAL SEA* departed for Yankee Station.

October Although the VA-25 SPADS were not assigned special strike missions due to the vulnerability of the aircraft in highly defended areas, the squadron's role in delaying movement of enemy traffic toward South Vietnam was instrumental in the war effort. Our A-1 pilots were hit by enemy fire nearly ten times in the first operating period but maintenance crews, working 'round-the-clock, patched up holes and repaired damage with a speed and effectiveness which kept aircraft availability at a steady high.

October 26 Mishandling of a parachute-flare was the probable cause of a hanger deck fire aboard *USS ORISKANY (CVA 34)*. Among the 44 officer and men who died was ex-FIST pilot LCDR OMAR R. FORD. Ex-FIST Skipper HARRY E. ETTINGER was also aboard, but escaped without injury. After a short stop at Subic Bay, *ORISKANY* returned to North Island and then entered Hunters Point Shipyard.

*ORISKANY* held memorial services for the ship's 44 dead on November 6, 1966. The body of LT Omar R. Ford was buried at sea, 125 miles southeast of Iwo Jima.

6 November LCDR SMITH and Ltjg GARDINER were instrumental in the rescue of an Air Force pilot brought down inland by hostile fire. The weather was poor and the rescue was carried out in mountainous terrain. LCDR SMITH successfully evaded enemy ground fire during transit to the SAR area. Racing daylight he obtained a successful pickup in the twilight. Although fired upon, he successfully escorted the helo back to the rescue destroyer during darkness.

8 November CDR JIM "Bagger" BURDEN recorded his 100th *CORAL SEA* landing, becoming VA-25's first *CORAL SEA* Centurion.



- 10 November The first A-7A (BuNo 152665) arrived at NAS Lemoore, assigned to VA-122 and flown by ex-FIST pilot, CDR SCOTT L. SMITH.
- 11 November Ltjg LYNNE and Ltjg GARDINER, while on a night flight, diverted to search for a *CORAL SEA* A-4 pilot who ejected from his stricken aircraft near the coast. The two aviators soon located the pilot and directed a Navy helo to the scene, and a prompt and successful rescue was soon effected.
- 18 November LCDR EHRET and Ltjg MARCUS were fired upon by two Russian-built surface-to-air missiles (SA-2) west of Hong Me Island; Ltjg MARCUS narrowly escaped being hit while maneuvering to avoid the supersonic missiles.
- 26 November Petty Officer HOLLIE RUSSELL was killed in a flight deck accident when a LAU-3 rocket pod (about 416-lbs) fell on him while he was working on Canasta 580.
- November Weather continued to hamper operations, but many sorties were successful in operations in South Vietnam.
- 4 December *CORAL SEA* again headed to Subic Bay for a well-earned rest.
- 20 December After more than a week in Subic Bay, *CORAL SEA* dropped anchor in Hong Kong, which most agree was the highlight of the cruise. After a valiant attempt to "buy out" the merchants of Hong Kong and Kowloon, the ship spent a quiet Christmas Day.
- 26 December *CORAL SEA* and VA-25 were again underway for her third and last period on Yankee Station.
- 28 December CVW-2 and VA-25 were again carrying out operations against North Vietnam, and the pace of operations was routine to the last working day of 1966, except for a new mission assigned to VA-25's already large list. Naval Gunfire Support was added, as VA-25 SPADs acted as aerial spotters for destroyers cruising just off shore north of the DMZ, in an attempt to stop waterborne traffic of supplies into South Vietnam from the North.



VA-25 SPAD embarked in *CORAL SEA* with RESCAP bomb load

## 1967 **Commander in Chief = Lyndon B. Johnson**

- 1 January VA-25 continued combat operations in the Gulf of Tonkin, flying RESCAP missions, Naval Gunfire Support, and in-country ground fire support missions over North and South Vietnam.
- 31 January This last on-line period, though punctuated with many action filled missions, was routine in nature, and the ship departed Yankee Station. *CORAL SEA* spent five days at Subic Bay for debriefings before proceeding to Yokosuka for more debriefings, including the relieving carrier.
- 13 February *CORAL SEA* departed for San Francisco.
- 23 February VA-25 arrived at NAS Lemoore and began a thirty-day leave period.
- 26 February The first aerial mining was conducted by seven A-6As led by CDR ARTHUR H. BARIE of VA-35 Black Panthers. Minefields were planted at the Song Ca and Song Giang rivers
- 26 March The training cycle began in earnest, with concentration centered on ordnance delivery and carrier landing practice, necessary due to the planned short training cycle prior to VA-25's third combat deployment.
- 1 April VA-25 officially became a component of CVW-15, after thirteen WestPac deployments with CVW-2, and tail feathers were changed to NL. CVW-Fifteen was commanded by CDR JAMES R. LINDER since 3 February.

A personnel inspection was held in conjunction with a CVW-2 awards ceremony, in which officers and men of VA-22, VA-23, and VA-25 received awards won during the previous cruise.

- April COMFAIRALAMEDA held VA-25's ADMAT inspection in which the squadron received an overall grade of 93, or EXCELLENT.
- 24 April *USS KITTY HAWK (CVA-63)* launched the first strike against MiG bases in North Vietnam. The daylight strike of A-4 and A-6 aircraft was supplemented by an A-6 strike later that night.
- 23/29 April VA-25 deployed to NAAS Fallon for intensive training in conventional ordnance delivery techniques. Squadron aircraft were in the air from 0700 to 2300 each day. VA-25 pilots also took part in strikes simulating combat conditions in Vietnam, flying its RESCAP role, and on each occasion, "rescued" at least one downed pilot previously placed on the ground in a random spot. The last two days were used for the COMPETITIVE EXERCISES, in which each pilot was given an opportunity to prove his skill in each type of ordnance delivery. Despite winds of 20-30 knots gusting to 40 knots, VA-25 pilots won a total of 26 E's for excellence.
- 3/4 May Most of VA-25's SPAD drivers day qualified in carrier landings aboard the *CORAL SEA*.
- 23/24 May The pilots again landed aboard *CORAL SEA* qualifying this time at night.
- 8 June COMFAIRALAMEDA held the Maintenance/Material portion of the ADMAT inspection. A grade of 88.23, or GOOD was assigned as an overall average to the Maintenance Department.
- 9 June In a ceremony held in the VA-25 hanger, Rear Admiral FRED E. BAKUTIS, Commander Fleet Air Alameda, gave tribute to the Douglas Skyraider, flown by VA-25 for 20 years, since 21 September 1947. Mr. N. A. CARHART, the Vice-President of the Douglas Aircraft Corporation, and Mr. L. J. DEVLIN, one of the co-designers of the Skyraider, and the officers and men, and their guests, joined to celebrate the longevity of the venerable aircraft, after which a reception was held at the Officers Club.
- 19/30 June VA-25 embarked in *CORAL SEA* for a ten day Weapons Training Exercise, which included both conventional and nuclear weapons. This was merely a familiarization operation designed to acquaint the new Air Wing and new personnel to the procedures necessary to accomplish the mission, and paved the way for the Operational Readiness Exercise and Operational Readiness Inspection soon to follow. The WEPTRAEX concluded with a fly-off to NAS Alameda.
- 1 July Dependents of the officers and men of the ship and embarked squadrons were again very fortunate on July first to be able to accompany the *CORAL SEA* out to sea and observe typical carrier operations as the ship held a Dependent's Day Cruise, getting a good look at what husbands, sons, and fathers were really doing when hard at work at sea.
- 5/13 July After spending Independence Day at Alameda, the Ship and Air Wing participated in operation "Dynamic Action", simulating actual conditions in the Gulf of Tonkin. This was the Operational Readiness Exercise. *CORAL SEA* put in at Alameda for final preparations for the forthcoming cruise.
- 19 July LT RON WILLIAMSON was killed in a tragic civil air accident while enroute home for pre-deployment leave. Also killed in the same airliner was the newly nominated Secretary of the Navy, JOHN T. McNAUGHTON.
- 21 July A memorial service was held at NAS Lemoore Chapel for LT WILLIAMSON.
- 26 July VA-25 embarked in *CORAL SEA*, sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge bound once more for the Gulf of Tonkin, this time on her third Vietnam combat cruise, and Fourteenth WestPac deployment, but the first with CVW-15.
- 29 July Fire broke out on the flight deck of *USS FORRESTAL (CVA-59)* resulting in severe damage plus 132 dead, 2 missing, and 62 injured. The fire occurred during preparation for launch. LT JOHN McCAIN of VA-46 escaped from his burning plane. The ship received temporary repairs in Subic Bay and then departed for Norfolk. After recovering from his injuries, McCain volunteered to join VA-163 aboard *USS ORISKANY*, but was shot-down on 26 October 1967 and became a POW and much later was elected Senator from Arizona.
- 30 July Upon arrival in the Hawaiian Islands, the ship began the Operational Readiness Inspection, with VA-25 reaping a score of 92.95, or Excellent.

- 5/13 August After 3 days in port at Pearl Harbor, the ship was once again underway for Yokosuka, Japan.
- 17 August CORAL SEA departed Yokosuka for Subic Bay.
- 19 August While flying practice strikes against targets in the vicinity of Okinawa, LCDR FRED GATES was lost at sea when his A-1 crashed into the sea 1/4-mile behind the ship. His engine failed as he was attempting to land aboard the ship with engine trouble. A memorial service was held on the hanger deck of *CORAL SEA* on 21 August.
- 20 August ENSIGN RAMSEY made *CORAL SEA*'s 170,000 landing, making her the first attack carrier ever to record this number of landings.
- 22/25 August CORAL SEA arrived in Subic Bay, and then departed for Yankee Station to begin combat operations on the 28th.
- 30 August Ltjg GARDINER, while making a rocket run on a logistics boat near Cape Falaise, NVN, experienced engine failure and ditched successfully at sea. An Air Force "JOLLY GREEN" picked him up amid cascading waterspouts caused by enemy shore batteries taking pot shots at the rescue helo. CDR CHURCH, LCDR RITZMAN, LCDR MOSER, and ENS RAMSEY were instrumental in the successful rescue. Disregarding their own safety, they effectively silenced enemy 37mm shore batteries shooting at the helo.
- 7 September CDR BURDEN and ENS RAMSEY effectively directed naval gunfire for the *USS DAMOTO* on enemy shore batteries causing three spectacular secondary explosions. The SPADs drew light AAA fire and also enemy radar lock on associated with surface to air missiles, but remained on station to direct destroyer fire when the enemy shore batteries began returning fire at the destroyers. With time and fuel remaining, the two pilots continued on a coastal armed RECCE, sinking two waterborne logistics craft and damaging two others.
- Later the same day, LCDR RITZMAN and Ltjg THOM, while working with other Sea Dragon surface units, effectively silenced a coastal gun site on Hon Mat Island that had taken the three destroyers under concentrated and accurate fire.
- 11 September LCDR RITZMAN and LCDR MOSER were awakened at 0200 for a special RESCAP for a downed Air Force pilot just north of the DMZ area. On arrival in poor weather, flares were dropped and LCDR MOSER made several passes to attempt exact location of the survivor with direction finding equipment. He then showed his aircraft external lights over the location for the helo, and he observed light AAA. The downed pilot fired a flare, and the helo was called in. LCDR MOSER made a pass at 2000 feet and one at 500 feet to check for hostile fire than might endanger the helo. Unfortunately, no more was heard from the pilot on the ground and the SAR effort was terminated.
- 15 September Ltjg THOM diverted to the *USS HORNET (CVS-12)* with a sump warning light. The deck was ready on arrival and a safe landing was quickly effected. He "stole" *HORNET*'s 102,000 landing, as the deck had been held open for the Air Group Commander to do the honors! He was airborne again 2-1/2 hours later, but not before cutting the traditional cake on the flight deck, and receiving a piece with "CORAL SEA" inscribed on it for personal delivery to *CORAL SEA*'s Skipper, Captain SHAWCROSS, from *HORNET*'s Skipper, Captain ROBERTSON.
- 17 September Ltjg NICHOLS captured the honors by making *CORAL SEA*'s 172,000 landing.
- 27 September CDR CHURCH, LCDR MOSER, Ltjg DUNN, and ENS HILL dropped their ordnance under control of an airborne forward air controller (FAC) and succeeded in destroying 12 bunkers and uncovering a tunnel in the DMZ.
- September During the first line period, VA-25 pilots claimed 16 logistic craft destroyed, 31 damaged, 2 flak sites destroyed and one damaged, 5 enemy troops KIA in three engagements, and 12 bunkers destroyed and one tunnel uncovered. Other damage is probable, but no bomb damage assessment was possible in many cases because of smoke, dust, vegetation or hostile fire.
- 1 October **CDR CLIFFORD E. CHURCH** relieved CDR JAMES BURDEN in ceremonies on the hanger deck, as the public address system played "Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines". The ship was then underway for Subic Bay and an 8-day rest. Many of the officers were able to make a side trip to Bangkok, Thailand during this period.
- October On Yankee Station once again, the unique capabilities of the vulnerable A-1 were amply demonstrated by LCDR's SMITH and Ron BOLT. LCDR SMITH spotted an RA-3 (EA-3) heading out to sea from the North Vietnamese coastline. It was on fire and a few moments later crashed into the water about 6 miles from land, killing the pilot. Another *CORAL SEA* aircraft saw two parachutes. LCDR SMITH quickly found that the two downed airmen had



come down right in the middle of a large North Vietnamese fishing fleet. He immediately assumed the role of on-scene-commander, and set up a protective pattern around the survivors, who were in immediate danger of being captured by several of the converging boats. After six highly accurate rocket and strafing runs, all the boats veered away to the north and LCDR BOLT, who was on his first combat mission, departed to find and escort the SAR helo, CLEMENTINE TWO, to the scene. At this time, enemy shore batteries began to fire at the downed airmen and soon established a bracket so accurate; it was suspected that the fishing fleet was directing fire. LCDR SMITH dispatched two A-4s to suppress the shore batteries, and soon the rescue helo was on hand. LCDR SMITH turned over on-scene-command to the helo, which made the rescues in record time.

Later, it was learned from the two survivors that the fishing fleet was firing rifles at the two SPADs, and that their devastating fire had sunk 6 of the boats. They further stated that had it not been for the two A-1s, they would surely have been captured.

24 October VA-25 A-1s contributed to the efficient rescue of a downed Air Force pilot 2 miles southwest of the Do Son peninsula. LCDR Zip RAUSA and LCDR BOLT arrived over the scene almost immediately and kept the pilot in sight until Big Mother 590 arrived, closely followed by a Clementine helo, escorted by two more VA-25 SPADs, flown by LCDR MOSER and Ltjg THOM. As the Big Mother neared, shore batteries opened up on the helo, but a swift rescue was made before the enemy could bracket the target.

October During this two week period, working under favorable weather conditions, VA-25 pilots, in addition to their highly successful RESCAP and Naval Gunfire Support missions, accounted for 19 logistic craft destroyed and 50 damaged, 1 coastal defense site destroyed, 9 supply and military buildings destroyed and 11 damaged, 5 enemy KIA, and many fires and secondary explosions of unknown origin.

November *CORAL SEA* once again spent time in Subic Bay, as installation of the long awaited Yankee extraction seat began in VA-25 aircraft. The ship had to leave one day early however, as typhoon "Emma" was rapidly approaching the area. For five days *CORAL SEA* ran before Emma.

8 November Delayed by Typhoon Emma, *CORAL SEA* finally dropped anchor in Hong Kong harbor.

13 November After three days in the magic city, *CORAL SEA* was again on the line at Yankee Station.

During the next period, VA-25 pilots were active at picking away at North Vietnam's communication and supply system, although there were few significant sorties flown. The winter monsoon season, or "Chachin" weather, had begun in earnest, hampering operations all over the Tonkin Gulf region.

4 December Ltjg THOM and ENS RAMSEY answered a call for help from the destroyer *OSBORNE*, which had taken hits from a coastal defense site north of Cape Mui Ron, wounding several of her crew. *OSBORNE* request the SPADs retaliate on the defense site. Two S-2 aircraft, acting as spotters, pinpointed the target, and, after several rocket runs on the target, there was one medium fire in the area, 100% coverage with the rockets. Light automatic weapons were seen to be firing at the attacking SPADs.

7 December This at sea period ended with VA-25 accounting for many secondary explosions, 6 logistic craft destroyed and 41 damaged, 8 coastal defense sites damaged, 7 supply buildings destroyed and 7 damaged, 7 bunkers destroyed, 3 enemy KIA, 9 road cuts, 1 bridge damaged, and 8 trucks destroyed.

December After almost a week in Subic Bay, *CORAL SEA* was back on Yankee Station

21 December After five days of combat operations, *CORAL SEA* received her first real taste of Christmas, when the Bob Hope's Christmas Show put on a tremendous performance for the officers and men.

22 December LCDR BILL COOK, of VA-155, was shot down near Ha Tinh. His wingman observed a good chute, and soon four SPADs, piloted by Ltjgs Marcus, GARDINER, NICHOLS, and DUNN, were overhead. LTJGs MARCUS and GARDINER left to escort a rescue helo to the scene. Although it appeared that the survivor was lying face down in a rice paddy, it was believed that he might be playing possum. The helo arrived and hovered a few feet over LCDR COOK only to confirm that he was dead. The helo began taking very heavy automatic fire and the SPADs provided protection for the helo until it got clear of the enemy coast. Between the helo and the A-1s, many enemy gunners were left dead. Two SPADs (MARCUS and GARDINER) took multiple small arms hits as they swooped low to provide protection for the helo.

26 December Ltjg MARCUS was hit by ground fire, probably from a 14.5 mm automatic weapon, as he and LCDR McDERMOTT were sinking 10 WBLCs (Water Borne Logistics Craft). Ltjg

MARCUS' aircraft received a large hole in the prop, and a shattered windscreen, but he sustained no injury.

- 27 December On a Sea Dragon mission, LT JORDAN and Ltjg THOM were diverted towards a Mayday call by Carbine One, about 15 miles out to sea from Dong Hoi, and arrived in time to see the aircraft crash into the sea. Within minutes, there were a total of 6 aircraft, 3 helicopters and 2 destroyers converging on the two survivors, who had ejected.
- Crown aircraft and LT JORDAN simultaneously sighted the two men, and the helicopters were quickly vectored to the scene. Unfortunately, one of the downed crewmen slipped from the sling at the helo door and was never found.
- 29 December ROCK RIVER 203 (VF-161) was shot down among the northern islands of the Gulf of Tonkin. LCDR BOLT and ENS RAMSEY arrived overhead for search and protection. LCDR ROUSA and Ltjg DUNN rendezvoused with BIG MOTHER 71 and escorted it to the survivors. The air temperature was 40°F, and speed was important. The pickup was rapidly made, with no opposition, and soon two very happy *CORAL SEA* pilots were back aboard. Their comments: "When we saw the SPADs, we knew we had it made!"
- 30 December The final significant event of the year came when LCDR Zip RAUSA "bagged" *CORAL SEA*'s 178,000 landing, further boosting her record as the "Landingest Attack Carrier in the Fleet". During the year 1967, not one VA-25 aircraft was lost to hostile fire in more than five months of actual combat.
- During this at sea period, squadron pilots took an active part in nine actual rescue attempts, of which two were successful, with VA-25 pilots taking credit for locating and protecting 4 downed airmen. They also accounted for 5 trucks destroyed and three damaged, 23 WBLCs destroyed and 62 damaged, 6 road cuts, 1 radar site damaged, 1 military structure destroyed and 1 damaged, and 1 bunker damaged. In addition, 9 secondary explosions of unknown origin were recorded.

## 1968

### Commander in Chief = Lyndon B. Johnson

- January MONTANA 405 ejected 10 miles southwest of the Do Son peninsula in a heavily defended area, and LCDR MOSER and Ltjg THOM were vectored by the North SAR destroyer to the scene of the search. 405's wingman had observed him drop into a village. The emergency beeper was heard for a short time, shut off, and the parachute disappeared. The SPADs found nothing on arrival, and were soon recalled by the SAR destroyer.
- Ltjg DUNN's engine swallowed a valve while he was on station 30 miles northwest of the North SAR destroyer for an Alpha strike RESCAP. Although the engine poured black smoke, and ran extremely rough, he was able to fly 100 miles back to the ship and land safely.
- CDR CHURCH and Ltjg THOM arrived over a downed F-4 in Laos, where an airborne FAC was also circling. They were directed to drop ordnance around the wreckage to aid any survivors, but no visual or electronic signals were ever heard. The two SPADs then unloaded all remaining ordnance on the 37mm flak site.
- January 16 *CORAL SEA* was again on Yankee Station. She had departed Yankee Station for R&R at Subic Bay and Hong Kong, to make up the time lost before because of Typhoon "Emma."
- 21 January LCDR RAUSA and ENS RAMSEY went to the rescue of some friendly troops in Laos, which were pinned down by enemy troops with anti-aircraft weapons. BDA was one weapon site silenced, and helicopters were waiting to pick up the recon unit as the SPADs departed. Flak sites were firing at the aircraft as they attacked.
- 23 January *USS PUEBLO (AGER 2)* was captured by a North Korean patrol boat. The *ENTERPRISE* and screen ran northward from Yankee Station to operate in the Sea of Japan for almost a month.
- 25 January LCDR SMITH, LCDR RITZMAN and Ltjg GARDINER took part in the first of many strikes in the Khe Sanh area of northwest South Vietnam and Laos. Enemy troop concentrations had been building up, and a FAC vectored 3 SPADs to a mortar position among the trees. Numerous attacks only netted one secondary explosion, but this rapidly developed into multiple explosions and fires. The airborne FAC reported to another flight of SPADs ten minutes later that he couldn't keep count there were so many.
- 26 January A flight led by LCDR RITZMAN, and including LCDR RAUSA, Ltjg THOM, and Ltjg MARCUS, came to the aid of a friendly Laotian outpost which had just been overrun by NVA, just 10 miles west of Khe Sanh. The camp was burning and the FAC reported friendly troops escaping to the east, with enemy troops to the north. All ordnance was dropped within 100 meters to the north of the camp and the FAC reported BDA as 100% in target area.

Later that day, CDR SKELTON, LCDR Ron BOLT, Ltjg Al NICHOLS, and Ltjg DUNN attacked and destroyed an NVA outpost in the vicinity of Khe Sanh, also getting 2 secondary explosions. Later, CDR CHURCH and LT JORDAN destroyed 30 meters of trench in a fortified village near an overrun friendly airfield in Laos.

LCDR RAUSA, Ltjg THOM, Ltjg PELLOT, and ENS HILL attacked an enemy controlled village and a storage area, netting 3 secondary fires, destroying 4 buildings in the village, and a secondary explosion and fire in the storage area.

CDR CHURCH, LCDR SMITH, LCDR BOLT and Ltjg GARDINER hit an enemy controlled village, resulting in 3 secondary explosions, 5 fires, and destroyed 4 buildings, all under FAC control.

CDR SKELTON, LT JORDAN, Ltjg HAGEN, and ENS RAMSEY were directed to attack two outposts overrun recently by NVA, resulting in 70% destruction on one and 80% on the other.

27 January The overrun camp was the target of LCDR SMITH, LT JORDAN, Ltjg PELLOT, and Ltjg HAGEN. The FAC reported 29 buildings destroyed with 2 secondary explosions, and 12 buildings left burning.

29 January It was learned that the ship would be extended on the battle line at least ten days. This extension eventually turned to 20 days, and then into a further extension for duty near Korea.

1 February LCDR SMITH and Ltjg HAGEN attacked a hilltop entrenchment area in Laos, covering it well with napalm, and obtained 3 secondary fires.

In support of operation "Scotland", CDR SKELTON, LCDR BOLT, and LCDR MOSER attacked a storage area, and shifted to a machine gun nest firing at them. The result was 2 secondary fires, one bunker destroyed, 1 secondary explosion, and 1 .50 caliber gun site silenced.

3 February LCDR SMITH and Ltjg HAGEN destroyed 3 buildings, 2 bunkers, and 20 meters of trench in a NVA outpost in Laos.



Canasta 405 heading for *Coral Sea* and a hot shower

4 February CDR CHURCH and Ltjg DUNN destroyed 2 buildings, set 2 trucks afire, got one secondary explosion, destroyed 4 bunkers, and uncovered 50 meters of tunnel in a Laotian military complex.

7 February Pressure in the Khe Sanh area began to increase as LCDR RUSA and Ltjg GARDINER came to the aid of besieged troops at Lang Vei Special Forces camp 5-7 miles southwest of Khe Sanh. NVA troops were overrunning the camp, and 8 US Army Special Forces troops were trapped inside. Under low ceilings the two SPADs strafed and bombed the northern half of the outpost, to relieve pressure on the southern half of the camp, where the men were trapped in a bunker. The camp was covered well, but no BDA was available because the FAC was so busy directing all the aircraft he could get. Small arms fire against the two low flying aircraft was heavy, and both aircraft took two small arms holes.

LT THOM and Ltjg PELLOT dropped on the same target an hour later, destroying 5 buildings with low level bomb attacks. CDR CHURCH and Ltjg HAGEN, in a separate section, also joined in at the same time in the destruction of the enemy held buildings.

Later LCDR SMITH and LT NICHOLS also attacked the northern half of the camp and the FAC called good hits clear the bunker with trapped men inside but no attacking forces.

Between Navy carrier-based aircraft and Air Force jets and SPADs, the 8 men in the bunker were protected all day long, although they were unable to escape. Finally, in the late afternoon, CDR SKELTON, LCDR BOLT, LT JORDAN, and ENS HILL were called on target and made as many low level attack runs as possible to prolong the protection time. Then, as the SPADs ran out of ordnance, the FAC, who was in radio contact with the 8 trapped men, decided this was the best opportunity to get the men out. He directed the



SPADs to make dummy runs over the camp to keep the VC down, and 7 of the 8 men made a run for it. The SPADs dived and watched as the men made it to safety after being trapped all day. The 8th man was wounded, but was later rescued.

USAF CAPT James E. BLITZ, the FAC who controlled this flight, later wrote the command a letter with details of the action. His closing statement was: "For their exceptional performance, one of the finest that I've seen in 8 months as a FAC, I recommend that your unit's Awards and Decorations officer submit them for the Distinguished Flying Cross."

8 February Communist troops were putting pressure on hilltop outposts within 300 yards of the Khe Sanh perimeter, and LCDR BOLT and LT THOM were recalled in the middle of a mission to help. The troops at Khe Sanh had requested 20mm cannon for accurate firepower to help repel attacks on a hilltop outpost. LCDR BOLT lost his receiver and was unable to receive the instructions necessary to strafe the enemy so close to friendly troops. LT THOM left him at a safe orbit point and dove under a 4000 foot overcast and emptied his 800 rounds of 20mm on the backside of the hill, where the FAC indicated. Because of the low ceiling and heavy return fire, the FAC did not assess BDA, but reported all ordnance on target and that it had relieved pressure on the hilltop.

CDR CHURCH and Ltjg PELLOT came to the rescue of some Marines pinned down near Khe Sanh, and after dropping 16 bombs and strafing; the troops were able to walk around.

During this period, the morale of all hands in the squadron soared. The A-1 SKYRAIDER, built to carry large loads of ordnance long distances, and remain overhead long periods of time, and designed to drop ordnance in close support of ground action, had been principally utilized the entire cruise for RESCAP mission, 95% of which involved orbiting for 3-4 hours and recovering with little or no positive damage inflicted on the enemy. But the heavy action at and near Khe Sanh was ideally suited to the SPAD's capabilities, and division after division of SPADs launched with individual loads such as 12 - 250 lbs bombs, or 4 - 500s, 4 - 250s, and 4 - napalm, or 2 - 750s, 6 - 250s, and 4 - 500s, in addition to 800 rounds of 20mm cannon, including armor piercing, high explosive and incendiary rounds. The foregoing detailed accounts are only examples of typical action during this period.

9 February CORAL SEA switched to the night schedule, and for the rest of the line period, only one event per day was able to get into the Khe Sanh area when it was light, and after the early morning low overcast and fog cleared.

11 February LCDR RAUSA and Ltjg MARCUS again attacked the overrun camp at Lang Vei, destroying 5 military structures, and LCDR RAUSA received a 37mm flak hole in his outer port wing.

The same day LCDR BOLT and Ltjg HAGEN attacked another camp overrun by VC about 15 miles west of Khe Sanh. The FAC reported 4 military structures destroyed, 3 secondary fires, one road cut, one bridge damaged, with the approaches cratered at both ends, and a river ford was cratered.

14 February Ltjg JOSEPH P. DUNN was ferrying an unarmed A-1 from NAS Cubi Point to the ship, when he strayed near the Communist Chinese island of Hainan. A MiG interceptor attacked without warning, shooting LTJG DUNN down, about 8 miles off the eastern shore. An EA-1F flying with Ltjg DUNN narrowly escaped, and returned to report a beeper in the area almost immediately thereafter. Since neither of the two aircraft had known precisely where they were, search operations were delayed. CDR CHURCH and LCDR RAUSA, who were airborne at the time spent some time in search but in the wrong area. Ltjg GARDINER and Ltjg PELLOT also searched later, and although closer, were still in the wrong area.

At about 1800, about 8 hours after the incident, Ltjg DUNN's emergency beeper was heard and pinpointed to be about halfway up the eastern Hainan coastline. However, darkness closed in before a search could be initiated. Aircraft and helicopters were launched at first light the following morning, but no trace of the downed pilot could be found. Whether he was captured by the Chinese Communists or was unable to last the night in the cold water is unknown at this time. His status was changed to KIA on 20 November 1981.

Ltjg DUNN was probably the first Navy pilot to use the Yankee extraction seat recently installed in VA-25 SPADs. Diplomatic inquiries with the Chinese government and the pilot who shot down LT DUNN failed to resolve his disappearance.

20 February CORAL SEA's last day on the line. LCDR RAUSA and Ltjg PELLOT, on a night Close Air Support mission in South Vietnam, were diverted to a position 20 miles 130° from Khe Sanh, where a USAF F-4 had just been shot down. They were able to maintain contact with the pilot of Dacron Two and were relieved on station by LCDR SMITH and LCDR RITZMAN in time to drop their ordnance. These two SPADs were in turn relieved by CDR CHURCH, LCDR BOLT, and Ltjg HILL. Air Force A-1s relieved them in time to drop their ordnance

and depart for home. The Air Force A-1s arrived on station after dawn, when helicopters were able to affect a pickup of the pilot.

Ltjg HILL logged the last SPAD combat arrestment in the last SPAD attack squadron in the Navy.

- 21 February *CORAL SEA* arrived in Subic Bay. After a short stay, she departed for Sasebo, Japan
- 26 February *CORAL SEA* arrived in Sasebo. Instead of being sent home after a highly successful Vietnam combat cruise, it was urgently required that she participate in operations in the Sea of Japan, off Korea, as a result of the Pueblo crisis.
- 4 March *CORAL SEA* got underway for the Sea of Japan and VA-25 officers and men finalized preparations for a cold weather cruise. During the next two weeks, familiarization and training sorties were flown, including night work.
- 17 March Finally, *CORAL SEA* headed for Naval Station Yokosuka, Japan, for repairs and upkeep, and learned she was ordered home at completion of repairs.
- 6 April After 8 months and 11 days, VA-25 officers and men returned to their families at NAS Lemoore.
- 7 April The SPAD (BuNo 135300) that flew the last A-1 carrier-based combat mission was officially retired during ceremonies at NAS Lemoore.

Actually, VAW-13 continued to fly Electric SPADs in SE Asia for a time. On the East Coast, VA-176 still had a few SPADs on their ramp while waiting to transition to the A-6. Of course, the South Vietnamese and USAF continued flying SPADs in combat for several more years, but from shore bases.

**COMMANDER SCOTT L. SMITH** relieved **COMMANDER CLIFFORD E. CHURCH** as commanding officer in ceremonies following the SPAD retirement.

- 8 April The new Skipper made a brief farewell flight in NL 405 before Ltjg Ted Hill ferried the last SPAD to the Naval Air Museum at Pensacola, Florida. VA-25 began the transition (with VA-122) to the A-7 Corsair II and prepared for the next deployment scheduled in ten months. Except for Ltjg Hill, all other officers were transferred to other commands.

Ltjg HILL went to VA-127 for a hurry-up jet transition and jet instrument course then joined his future squadron mates in VA-122 for A-7 training. He was our LSO!

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