

Korean conflict. The Starfighters transitioned through a myriad of jets including the F9F Cougar, FJ3 Fury, and the legendary F4E/J Phantom II. While deployed in the Western Pacific on 10 July 1968, became the first east coast squadron to shoot down a Soviet built MIG-21 over North Vietnam.

In July of 1981, the Starfighters transitioned to the F14A Tomcat and later off the coast of Libya in March 1948 they escorted strikes across Khadafy's "Line of Death". True to their motto - Anytime, Anywhere, We'll Be There.

ATTACK SQUADRON THIRTY-FIVE

Commissioned on 1 July 1934, Attack Squadron Thirty-Five is the Navy's oldest Attack squadron. It has a long and illustrious career including combat action during World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam. The Panthers have operated the Great Lakes Aviation BG-1 Dive Bomber, the SBD Dauntless, SB2C Helldiver, the A-1 Skyraider, and currently the A6E (TRAM) Intruder.

The Black Panthers have been pacesetters throughout the history of naval aviation. The first squadron to become double winners of the coveted Atlantic Fleet Battle "E" and the CNO Aviation Safety "S" awards in 1959, the squadron repeated with double honors in 1972 and 1977. VA-35 additionally received the Safety "S" in 1973, 1975 and 1977; they also captured the Battle "E" in 1979, 1981 and 1983. In 1983 the squadron was awarded the Hughes Trophy for the second consecutive year for winning the Intruder Bombing Derby. The Black Panthers received the C. Wade McClusky trophy as the most outstanding attack squadron in the Navy in 1985. In 1986 the squadron captured the medium Attack Wing One annual bombing competition and the United Technologies/Norden Systems Maintenance Award.

CARRIER AIR WING (GROUP) SEVEN

Prior to 1946 the group was designated Air Group Eighteen and had an outstanding World War Two record aboard the USS BENNINGTON, and the USS INTREPID.

With only Air Group Three from AirLant to have previously taken part in the Korean conflict, Air Group Seven was a logical successor. The current group composed of VF-71, VF-72, VF-74 and VA75 had participated in a Mediterranean cruise and numerous Atlantic Fleet exercises and had reached a high state of preparedness. Thus, still intact, the two Panther squadrons, Corsair squadron, and Skyraider squadron were ordered to AirPac and the USS BON HOMME RICHARD. Detachments from VC-4, VC-12, VC-33, and VC-61 were assigned to the group to complete the combat team.

Air Group Seven reported to the ship on May 19, 1952, after flying its planes across country. Shortly thereafter, participation in the Operational Readiness Inspection by COMFAIRHAWAII substantiated the ability of the group to perform. A grade of "Excellent" and the comment "the best trained group yet inspected there prior to heading on to the Korean Theater" was received.

No sooner had the ship arrived in Far East waters than was the Air Group called upon to prove its worth by taking part in the great hydro-electric power plant strikes of 23 and 24 June, with devastating results on the assigned targets. Subsequent missions included "prop" strikes with the jets providing flak suppression, jet CAP and RECCO flights, photo and escort missions, prop gunfire spot for naval vessels, night attacks, and anti submarine patrols. Not to be outdone, the 650 men in the various squadrons provided outstanding availability and servicing permitting the group to operate with near 100 percent effectiveness.

FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVENTY-ONE

'Jet Pilots man planes'-a far cry from the beginning of the colorful history of FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVENTY-ONE which began in the spring of 1943 at NAS Whidbey Island, Washington, then equipped with twelve FM-1's and nine TBM's and known as VC-18. VC-18 participated in the strikes against Attu in the Aleutians in May and June of that year. The squadron was later reformed with thirty-six F6F's and returned to combat in June of 1944, aboard the USS INTREPID. This tour carried the squadron through the Palau, Philippines, Leyte, and Okinawa campaigns. On this cruise the 'Fickle Finger Squadron', thus known because of the gesturing devil insignia, was credited with 172 kills in the air, 300 planes destroyed on the ground, with assists in sinking the Japanese battleships MASASHI and YAMATO. A triumphant return was made to the United States late in 1944 after which the squadron was redesignated VF-18, moved to San Diego, and outfitted with F8F Bearcats.

In October 1945, the squadron moved to the east coast. Shortly after being redesignated and named, Fighting Seventy-One, proudly accepted for service the new F9F-2 Panthers in December 1949. Since that time the pilots have flown more than 13,000 hours and have made more than 2,500 carrier landings in the versatile Panther.

The spirit of teamwork continues today in training and combat flying.

FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVENTY-TWO

This fighting jet squadron launched its career in F9F Hellcats in 1945 engaging in Pacific campaigns in the latter part of World War II. Originally known as VBF-18 and later re-designated VF-7A, the squadron currently became VF-72 and moved to the east coast in 1946. From the time of its original commissioning fighter Squadron Seventy-Two had made more than twenty major cruises including many Atlantic Fleet exercises, four Mediterranean cruises, three to the Caribbean, a south American cruise to Argentina, and two North Atlantic cruises.

The squadron has a unique distinction of having flown nothing but Grumman aircraft and of operating the last F8F Bearcat aircraft in the fleet. Transition from F8F's to F9F panther jet aircraft was made in April 1951 and on complete outfitting the squadron went aboard the USS

Franklin D. ROOSEVELT for carrier qualification. Shortly afterwards F9F-5's were received and a six month period of service test flying commenced. In late 1951 the squadron was alerted for another Mediterranean cruise; however, prior to deployment, orders were received to WestPac and duty in the Korean Theater. Prior to departure for West Coast the squadron was again equipped with the F9F-2 and once more commenced an intensive training period in preparation for combat duty. Day and night qualifications on board the USS LEYTE completed the extensive carrier and ordnance training schedule, followed by the ferrying of all 16 F9F's across country to San Diego and the USS BON HOMME RICHARD.

The many hours of rocket firing and glide bombing paid real dividends as attested to by the excellent results obtained to date in the Korean combat area. The excellent availability of aircraft and performance of ordnance equipment attest to the ability and splendid performance of the crew.

FIGHTER SQUADRON SEVENTY-FOUR

Fighter Squadron Seventy-Four, the 'Be-Devilers', was commissioned in February 1950. Prior to that time, the squadron had been known as VF-92 of Air Group Nine, before joining its sister squadrons on the east coast.

The newly designated squadron participated in operation 'Portrex' in February and March 1950. The squadron changed over to the F4U in the spring. Temporarily joining Air Group Six, the squadron took part in the winter and spring cruise in the USS F.D. ROOSEVELT. The squadron participated in 'Lant Flex' in October 1951, and the shake-down cruise aboard the newly commissioned USS WASP. In March 1951 a rigorous workup was made in preparation for Korean combat operations. Particular emphasis was placed on glide bombing, strafing, and rocket attacks, as a means of preparing VF-74 for the role of an attack squadron.

The squadron played the dual role, flying over the ADs, carrying a bomb load, suppressing flak and making strikes.

ATTACK SQUADRON SEVENTY-FIVE

Originally established as Torpedo Squadron Eighteen in July 43 flying TBF and TBM, it was redesignated Attack Squadron Eight in November 46 continuing to fly various TBM models. "The Carrier Clowns" as it was known in 1945 was designated Attack Squadron Seventy-Five in July 48 flying the AD-3 and disestablished in November 49. Flying from INTREPID the squadron participated in the Battle for Leyte Gulf flying TBMs against a powerful Japanese surface force to contribute to the sinking of the Musashi, one of the two largest battleships in the world. The next day the squadron's aircraft were part of a Fast Carrier Task Force that attacked a Japanese carrier force in the Battle of Cape Engano helping sink four carriers. The following day the squadron was attacking the Japanese surface force retiring from the Battle Off Samar.

The squadron made the 1946 shakedown cruise of

LEYTE to the Caribbean and goodwill cruise to South America for the inauguration of Chile's President.

Following re-establishment, Attack Squadron Seventy-Five, now the "Sunday Punchers" was active in the Atlantic Fleet. In these years, VA-75 participated in a cold weather cruise, several Caribbean cruises, four Mediterranean cruises, plus numerous demonstration and qualification cruises. The "Sunday Punchers" have served aboard the LEYTE, PHILIPPINE SEA, MIDWAY, F.D. ROOSEVELT, TARAWA, KEARSARGE and in World War II operated in the Pacific aboard the Intrepid.

When Korean hostilities began, VA-75 was ordered to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean to bolster the Naval forces in that area. The squadron operated aboard the MIDWAY. In addition to flight operations the squadron personnel took advantage of the leave and recreation periods to assimilate the culture of the many European countries they visited.

In the early part of 1951, the squadron was sent to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to shake down the TARAWA, fresh out of mothballs. Training flights were made over most of the Caribbean area including Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and numerous other islands and foreign ports. During the summer, the "Sunday Punchers" operated aboard the Franklin D. Roosevelt for both demonstration and operational development of electronic equipment.

Early in 1952, VA-75 was tentatively scheduled for another Mediterranean cruise. However, notice was received that this cruise was cancelled and the squadron would be deployed to the Far East in May. An intensive training period and re-qualification ensued both in the New England area. The squadron deployed in BON HOMME RICHARD. The squadron put the Douglas Skyraider with the ability to carry tremendous armament to good use during distinguished combat action over Korea.

OTHER SQUADRONS

There are many other squadrons that served in LEYTE with distinction but unfortunately we do not have historical information on them. Some of these are: VA-4, VC-4, VA-7A, VF-7, VF-8A, VAW-12, VC-12, VB-18, VBF-18, VT-18, TB-18, VC-33, VF-34, VF-42, VC-62, VS-27, VS-30, VS-36, VS-39, HU-2, HS-9, VF(AW), and VMA.

USS LEYTE (CV-32) ASSOCIATION

The Association is a non-profit organization formed to perpetuate the memory of the USS LEYTE and all personnel that served in her (officers and enlisted, Air Group and Marines); to exchange mementoes and memories of tours of duty; to plan and arrange reunion meetings; to locate and contact former shipmates; to do anything necessary and proper to accomplish any of the purposes set forth above; to secure cooperative action in advancing the purposes set forth above. Membership shall consist of military and civilian persons who have served aboard. Associate membership shall consist of persons with special interests. There is also Life and Honorary membership.

