

THE US LEYTE CV, CVA, CVS-32 & AVT-10

Her keel was laid down as the Crown Point at Newport News, Virginia shortly after the Battle for Leyte Gulf, on 21 February 1944. She was christened USS LEYTE on 23 August 1945, under the sponsorship of Mrs. James M. Mead, wife of the United States Senator from the State of New York. On 11 April 1946, completed and ready for sea, she was commissioned and officially named the United States Ship LEYTE.

Following shakedown training in Guantanamo Bay with Air Group 18 embarked, LEYTE's maiden voyage took her through the Panama Canal on a goodwill cruise down the western seaboard of South America. The proud new carrier with Under Secretary of the Navy Brown, Fleet Admiral Leahy and other VIP's on board paid calls at Valparaiso, Chile and Callao, Peru. Following transit of the Canal again she resumed shakedown operations in the waters off Cuba and the Virgin Islands. She returned to Yorktown, Virginia on 12 December 1946. It was during these eventful months that Admiral Mark Mitscher, "father of modern Carrier Warfare" used LEYTE as his flagship.

The following three years were spent in numerous fleet exercises; winter maneuvers in Davis Straits area, testing cold weather flying, training of naval reservists and midshipmen visiting Argentina Newfoundland, Trinidad, Panama, and Guantanamo Bay; two Mediterranean cruises in 1947 as the flagship of Carrier Division 4. Port visits included Algiers, Golfe Juan, Raranto, Athens, Cyprus, Tripoli, Messina, Leghorn, Palermo, Cannes, Naples, Gibraltar, Souda Bay, Istanbul, Izmir, Alexandria, Taranto, and Malta. By now she had gained the reputation as the smoothest operating carrier in the fleet staying in port only long enough to tidy up and loosen up the crew. The third Mediterranean cruise was in 1949 and many of the same ports were visited with Christmas in Naples.

In the spring of 1950, the LEYTE again sailed out of her homeport, Quonset Point, Rhode Island for her fourth Mediterranean cruise. At Beirut, Lebanon in August she received word to proceed to support the United Nations Forces in Korea. After transferring embarked Marines to troop transports, she proceeded at maximum speed to Norfolk for fifteen days of preparations. She set sail for the Far East via the Panama Canal and San Diego with Air Group 3 embarked, covering the 18,500 miles at a average speed of 23 knots, to join Fast Carrier Task Force 77. The night of arrival was spent in refueling. The following day she was launching her jets and attack aircraft at the advancing North Korean Army, staying in action for 92 days of the 108 she operated in the Korean area. A record 52 consecutive days was spent at sea, an example for carriers in the conflict. Pilots from her deck flew 3,933 sorties, to accumulate 11,000 hours in the air inflicting massive damage upon the aggressors. Her planes were credited with one of the first kills of a MIG 15 aircraft and one of her pilots, Lieutenant (jg) Thomas J. Hudner, received the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism above and beyond the call of duty.

Detached from Seventh Fleet on 19 January 1951, LEYTE returned to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for a long

overdue overhaul. Following refresher training she left Norfolk astern for her fifth Mediterranean on 3 September 1951 and, after a midshipman cruise to Halifax, sailed on the sixth in August 1952. She was designated CVA in August 1952.

In the spring of 1953 LEYTE entered the Boston Naval Shipyard preparatory to decommissioning. In August 1953 word was received that she would be converted and designated the first anti-submarine warfare support aircraft carrier (CVS). During this conversion, disaster struck at 1515 on 15 October when there was an explosion in Her port catapult room which killed 32 and injured scores of others. The LEYTE crew began at once the process of repairing their torn and crippled ship. Three months later in January 1954 a still sad but proud LEYTE stood out of Boston Harbor on its way to a new career. "The warrior had turned sentinel".

Following refresher training in Cuba as the first CVS, LEYTE introduced the brand new Grumman S2F Tracker for their first operational deployment and spent the rest of the year learning anti-submarine warfare.

1955 saw the LEYTE engaging in three fleet exercises and making Her sixth Mediterranean cruise. She was chosen to be flagship of Commander Carrier Division 18 which she retained for the remainder of Her active service. For the final three active years she was the nucleus of a hunter-killer force comprised of a squadron of destroyers, herself and embarked air group with the combined mission of detecting, hunting, and killing enemy submarines. She was the first carrier to engage in operations against a nuclear submarine and was the forerunner and major contributor in the evolution of the tactics of hunter-killer forces opposing nuclear submarines. Her proficiency in this field was recognized in August 1958 when she received the Battle Efficiency Competition Award as the outstanding ship of her class.

LEYTE entered the New York Naval Shipyard for inactivation overhaul in January 1959 and was decommissioned there on 15 May 1959, having steamed nearly half a million miles in which she had launched and recovered 70,000 aircraft. On that day she was designated AVT-10. She departed Navy custody 242210Z September 1970.

"But the preceding are just facts and statistics behind which lies a legend greater than her accomplishments. There are certain ships which for no apparent reason are selected by fate to hold a special place among those which go down to the sea. And this was the lot of the LEYTE. From the infancy of her commissioning to her last days on the line, the reputation of the ship and her crew was that of one which regardless of the duty assigned would serve with distinction. Her crew always took pride in a very special manner, for they sensed, as only a sailor can, the flexibility, the preparedness, and the consistent ability to perform the impossible that constituted the character of the Leading LEYTE. Their spirit is legend. Her place is taken on the line by the great new super carriers, yet Her loss will be remembered. She was a fighter. What more can be

said of any ship?

Division of Naval History; Naval Institute Professional Notes; and the LEYTE News 10th Birthday Extra.

COMMENDATIONS AND MEDALS

Navy Unit Commendation: "For exceptionally meritorious service during operations against enemy aggressor forces in Korea from 9 October 1950 to 19 January 1951. Throughout this period, the USS LEYTE and her embarked air group consistently maintained a high standard of combat readiness and succeeded in inflicting extensive damage and destruction upon enemy lines of communication, installations, transportation facilities and troop concentrations."

Combat Action Ribbon, Korean Service Medal and United Nations Service Medal: 3 October 1950 through 26 January 1951

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Badge and Korean War Medal: 3 October 1950 through 26 January 1951

Navy Occupation Service Medal (Europe): 7 April through 6 June 1947; 7 August through 13 November 1947; 16 September 1949 through 17 January 1950; 13 May through 15 August 1950; 22 September through 10 December 1951; 5 September 1952 through 26 January 1953

HISTORY

USS LEYTE, named for the Battle for Leyte Gulf, is the third ship of the fleet to bear the name. The first LEYTE was an iron Spanish gunboat built in 1887 in Hong Kong, China. She was captured and taken into the United States Navy during the Spanish-American war. She was stricken from the list on 27 May 1907.

The second LEYTE was built as an internal combustion repair ship (ARG-8) and placed in commission 17 August 1944. She saw service in the South Pacific. Her name was changed to USS MAUI on 31 May 1945 so that the name LEYTE could be assigned to a new aircraft carrier under construction.

CARRIER AIR WING (GROUP) THREE

The second oldest Navy Air Wing, CVW-3 was commissioned on 1 July 1938 aboard the first carrier to bear the name USS SARATOGA. During World War II, the wing deployed aboard the SARATOGA until she was torpedoed in January 1942. Portions of the wing were then deployed aboard USS YORKTOWN and accounted for the crippling hits on the Japanese fleet carrier SORYU during the battle of Midway. The Korean War saw the wing aboard USS LEYTE, flying in support of the Pusan Perimeter, invasion of Wonsan and the strikes on the Hungnam Salient and Yalu River Bridges. In 1981 CVW-3 aircraft participated in air strikes against Lebanon in support of U.S. Marines stationed there. Then in January 1989 two CVW-3 F-14 Tomcats shot down two hostile Libyan Mig fighters over international waters in the central Mediterranean. Further distinguished service was conducted in action during the

Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations in 1990 and 1991.

FIGHTER SQUADRON THIRTY-ONE

Pilots of Fighting Thirty-One, second oldest fighter squadron in the Navy, as VF-1B flew from the deck of the nation's first aircraft carrier, USS LANGLEY (CV-1). With the approach of World War II the squadron was re-designated VF-6 and the older F4B's gave way to the Grumman F3F and F4F. Among the other aircraft flown by the Tomcatters were the F8F1 Bearcat, F2H Banshee, F3H Demon and the F4B Phantom.

Designated VF-31 on 7 August 1948, the squadron transitioned to its first jet aircraft, the F9F Panther. In succeeding years the Tomcatters have seen combat in Korea, Vietnam and most recently while flying photo reconnaissance missions over Lebanon in support of the Multinational Peacekeeping Force.

Among numerous awards and citations are the Admiral Joseph Clifton Trophy as the number one fighter squadron in the Navy in 1974, and the "Fox One" and the coveted "Grand Slam Award" for the Atlantic Fleet fighter squadron maintaining the best overall record for firing all types of air-to-air weapons.

FIGHTER SQUADRON THIRTY-TWO

Descended from Fighter Squadron Three, a part of CVW-3 in the 1930's. VBF-3 was created from VF-3 on 1 February 1945 aboard the USS YORKTOWN and participated in the first carrier strikes against the Japanese Mainland. On 7 August 1948 the squadron was re-designated Fighter Squadron Thirty-Two and later became the first to fly the F9F Cougar in 1951 and the F8 Crusader in 1956.

Swordsmen flew combat missions in 1950-51 in the Korean War, most notably at Chosin Reservoir; participated in the Lebanese conflict of 1958 and flew 96 support missions during the Cuban missile crisis in late 1962; 940 combat sorties in 3 line periods during the Vietnam War; and, in 1984 air patrol and TARPS missions in support of U.S. Multinational forces in Grenada and Lebanon including imagery of the 4 December 1983 CVW-6/CVW-3 air strikes on Syrian positions.

Significant awards include winning the Admiral Joseph Clifton Trophy as the number one Fighter Squadron in the Navy in 1975 and 1980; completed 10 years accident free flying on 19 October 1979, setting an unequalled record while flying 33,000 hours with more than 17,000 of those in the F-14 Tomcat air superiority fighter; the 1980 and 1982 CNO Aviation Safety Awards; the 1980 Fox-One Award for excellence in radar missile employment; and, the battle efficiency "E" for excellence in battle readiness in 1982.

FIGHTER SQUADRON THIRTY-THREE

The Starfighters of fighter Squadron Thirty-Three were commissioned at NAS Quonset Point, RI, in 1948. Flying the F8F Bearcat and later the F4U Corsair they provided combat strike support for ground operations during the

Korean conflict. The Starfighters transitioned through a myriad of jets including the F9F Cougar, FJ3 Fury, and the legendary F4B/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, KEARSAGE 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 personal 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.



LEYTE UNDERWAY TO PERFORM THE IMPOSSIBLE