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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
ATTACK SQUADRON FIFTEEN
PO NEW YORK 09501

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IN REPLY REFER TO:
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(Unclassified upon removal of enclosure (1))

From: Commanding Officer, Attack Squadron FIFTEEN
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-05D2)

Subj: Command History (Report Symbol 5350-1)

Ref: (a) OPNAV Instruction 5750.12A
(b) VA-15 Instruction 5750.12

Encl: (1) Attack Squadron FIFTEEN Command History

1. In accordance with references (a) and (b), enclosure (1) is forwarded.

R. C. McClary
R. C. McCLARY

Copy to:
Director of Naval History (OP-09B9)

CLASSIFIED BY ATKRON FIFTEEN
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
DECLASSIFIED ON 31 DEC 1980

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COMMAND HISTORY



1973

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Enclosure (1)

1973 CHRONOLOGY

January:

- 1st Attack Squadron FIFTEEN remains in a standdown condition following its return to Naval Air Station, Cecil Field on 11 December 1972 from a ten month deployment to the Mediterranean.
- 2nd Aircraft bureau number 154492 inducted into Aircraft Condition Evaluation (ACE) Program. This was the first aircraft to be inducted under this program.
- 8th Standdown period terminated, squadron turn-around training plan commenced.

February:

- 6th Squadron provided four aircraft to conduct simulated raids against the USS McCORD.
- 19th Squadron provided six sorties to act as raid aircraft for the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY undergoing her Operational Readiness Evaluation (ORE).

March:

- 13th Squadron commenced carrier refresher landing aboard the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT in the Jacksonville Operating Area.
- 21st Change of Command - Commander R. C. McCLARY relieved Commander F. A. LEES as Commanding Officer.
- 27th The squadron provided aircraft for CAP and raid missions for two days for the NATO Standing Naval Force operating in the Jacksonville area.

April:

- 14th The squadron moved aboard the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT at Mayport in preparation for commencing type training.
- 17th Commenced operations at sea.
- 25th Attack Squadron FIFTEEN/USS ROOSEVELT arrived Mayport for scheduled inport period.

April:

28th LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] piloted a squadron aircraft participating in a Quality Assurance Service Test (QAST) involving a B61 weapon.

May:

1st Commenced the second period of type training.

3rd Squadron participated in the sinking of a target hull in the Jacksonville operating area.

9th The squadron and the USS ROOSEVELT returned to Mayport on an unscheduled visit to allow the ship to make repairs. The squadron commenced shore based operations at NAS Cecil Field utilizing a small detachment of maintenance personnel.

10th The tenth and final squadron aircraft, bureau number 154410, completed the ACE program.

18th Nine aircraft were flown aboard the USS ROOSEVELT as the squadron continued its at-sea training.

24th The squadron commenced the three day Operational Readiness Evaluation (ORE).

27th Attack Squadron FIFTEEN returned to Mayport aboard the USS ROOSEVELT for a two day scheduled visit.

29th The squadron departed Mayport for participation in the fleet exercise LANTREDEX 3-73

31st During the month, the squadron logged 856.8 flight hours, a squadron record with the A-7 aircraft.

June:

3rd Four squadron aircraft carrying MK-82's sunk the target hull, DD-637, in the Puerto Rico operating area.

6th Participation in LANTREDEX 3-73 completed.

8th Squadron returned to NAS Cecil Field to continue its training cycle.

July:

- 9th LV Philippe BURCIER, French Navy reported aboard for duty.
- 11th Attack Squadron FIFTEEN returned to sea aboard the USS ROOSEVELT for participation in LANTREDEX 1-74.
- 25th Participation in LANTREDEX 1-74 completed.
- 26th Squadron returned to NAS Cecil Field.

August:

- 13th Squadron commenced scored weapons delivery exercises as part of the Battle Efficiency competition.

September:

- 6th Squadron pilots participated in an air demonstration for the USS ROOSEVELT's dependents cruise.
- 7th Carrier refresher landings aboard the USS ROOSEVELT were completed by staging out of NAS Cecil Field.
- 14th Attack Squadron FIFTEEN departed Mayport in the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT for the squadron's fourteenth Mediterranean deployment.
- 24th The squadron conducted a turn-over of Mediterranean information with Attack Squadron SEVENTY TWO aboard the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY in Rota, Spain.
- 29th The squadron arrived at its first Mediterranean liberty port, Barcelona.

October:

- 6th General recall, all leave and shore liberty cancelled due to armed conflict in the Middle East.
- 10th Underway in response to the continuing Middle East conflict.
- 19th The squadron provided maintenance personnel to assist in Operation Nickle Grass, the transfer of A-4 aircraft to Israel.
- 31st Squadron was awarded the CVW-SIX Maintenance Award for the period of September - October 1973.

November:

15th Arrived in Athens, the second liberty port.

21st Underway for continued operations south of Crete.

December:

3rd Arrived in Athens

13th Underway for transit to Barcelona.

19th Arrived in Barcelona for the Christmas holiday season.

NARATIVE HISTORY, 1973

A standdown period is designed to allow maximum leave and liberty for a deserving unit. It is normally a period of very reduced, or no operations, and only routine administrative work is performed. Such a standdown period is normally granted to units returning from extended deployments. While the Valions were scheduled for such a standdown, the new year found a large number of the squadron personnel hard at work.

A large number of new enlisted men (approximately 40) had checked into the squadron on our return from the Mediterranean. For the most part these were non-rated men who had just completed boot camp. These new recruits very quickly brought home the extent to which the Vietnam imposed austerity was affecting the Navy. Boot camp had been reduced to seven weeks and streamlined in content. We were therefore faced with recruits who knew very little about the Navy, Navy life, or Navy jobs. It was totally impossible to integrate these men into a squadron with a highly trained and efficient organization. Recruit training, therefore, became a major squadron effort, and a training program was implemented to try to correct some of the deficiencies of boot camp. At the urging of this squadron, COMLATWING ONE also established a school for these new recruits, and the long task of training was commenced. Starting with a few of the customs and traditions of the Navy, the recruit was eventually led to on-the-job training (OJT) in the various rating.

Shortly before the end of the 1972 deployment, the squadron and the Navy were faced with a difficult situation. Ten of our 12 aircraft were scheduled to go into Progressive Aircraft Rework (PAR) before the end of the fiscal year. While this in itself was not startling, the fact that the Navy did not have the funds available to induct all the aircraft and the fact that the squadron would most likely re-deploy prior to the end of the fiscal year made the situation perilous. Out of necessity the Navy came up with a new program, Aircraft Condition Evaluation (ACE). Under this program a team of inspectors from the Jacksonville Rework Facility would carefully inspect each aircraft and determine the extent of its rework requirements. This was a major shift from the traditional process of inducting all aircraft at a predetermined period for a complete rework. The first aircraft was inducted into the ACE program on 2 January 1973 and its production order included:

1. remove engine.

2. remove flight controls.
3. incorporate technical directives.
4. make repairs as per squadron request and ACE evaluation.
5. strip and paint.

All other aircraft followed a similar production order. (For more information on ACE, see NAVAIRREWORK JAX ACE manual of 24 September 1972)

The year started, therefore, with two major problems areas: reduced aircraft availability because of the ACE program, and reduced efficiency because of a large number of untrained personnel. On the positive side, however, all the squadron pilots were experienced carrier aviators and only one was due to be replaced before the next cruise. The squadron Maintenance Department also had a large nucleus of experienced and capable supervisors.

The standdown period ended on 8 January 1973 as the squadron commenced its readiness training program with a three day safety standdown/back-in-the-saddle program. Flying commenced late in the afternoon on the 10th; and in spite of all the problems, the squadron logged over 330 hours for the month.

Readiness training is nothing glamorous. Instead it is the day-to-day effort to improve and polish the basic operating procedures. For the pilots this means airmanship, instruments, navigation, weapon delivery, and much more. For the maintenance crews it means mechanical ability to perform quickly and safely the many jobs required to keep the planes flying. For all it means long hours and hard work. This is especially true when the effort is confined to four days each week.

Adopting the four-day work-week advocated by Commander, Light Attack Wing ONE, the squadron soon found that the off-going night shift was meeting the on-coming day shift. Still the principle behind the plan was worthwhile and the squadron continued to seek a workable solution. As the training began to pay dividends in better availability, the work load became a manageable quantity, and the four-day work-week became firmly entrenched. It was definitely a boost to morale from the very start and undoubtedly saved the overall air station a considerable amount of money.

In February the squadron flew 515 hours. Most of this time was in direct support of the squadron's flight training plan, but the Valions did provide ten sorties in support of fleet activities. On 6 February the USS McCORD was conducting sea trials following her shipyard repair period. The squadron provided four sorties for use in calibrating the ship's radar. This was accomplished by flying at different altitudes and airspeeds and by varying the approach bearings. On 19 February six sorties were flown as raids against the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY. This effort as Orange forces was in support of the ship's Operational Readiness Evaluation (ORE). Participation in yet another exercise, LANTCORTEX, was cancelled shortly before take-off on the 15th because of bad weather in the operating area.

The shore-based training program's main objective is the preparation of the squadron to commence its sea-based training. Therefore most of the flying in early March was directed toward field carrier landing practice (FCLP). With this complete, the squadron commenced a three day carrier qualification (CQ) period on 13 March aboard the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT in the Jacksonville operating area. This effort was staged out of NAS Cecil Field and resulted in the accumulation of 127 carrier arrested landings in 59 sorties. The entire squadron was not requalified during this initial CQ period, however, so qualification continued on the 26th and 27th of March.

The highlight of the month was the change-of-command ceremony in which Commander R. C. McCLARY became the twenty-eighth commanding officer of Attack Squadron FIFTEEN (enclosure 1). He relieved Commander F. A. LEES on 21 March 1973 in ceremonies at NAS Cecil Field.

Other activities for the month included winning the NAS Cecil Field basketball championship and providing support sorties for the NATO Standing Naval Force. The basketball victory was extra rewarding since it came in a tough game with our arch rival and sister squadron, VA87. The support sorties for the NATO force were flown as combat air patrol (CAP) and raid missions. Some language problems existed in the control of the CAP aircraft, and the controlling ships had difficulty in maintaining IFF contact. Nevertheless, some intercepts were made and the ships seemed to enjoy the experience.

The never ending, never changing moving time arrived all too quickly. The squadron completed packing on the 13th of April, moved aboard on the 14th, and by the 17th the Valions were once again at sea in USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT. Operations aboard the "Rusty Roosie" would continue over the next two

months to include type training, the ORE, and a major Atlantic exercise, LANTREDEX 3-73.

The entire at-sea period was a busy time. On 28 April LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] dropped a B-61 weapon on the target range at Eglin Air Force Base (enclosure 2). This weapon delivery was part of Quality Assurance Service Test (QAST) that is conducted by the Navy each year. On 3 May the squadron participated in the sinking of a target hull located approximately 250 miles east of Jacksonville. The squadron completed its graded participation in the Nuclear Technical Proficiency Inspection (NTPI) on 5 May and received high praise from the inspectors (enclosure 3). A small reprieve was gained when the ship had to return to Mayport unexpectedly on 9 May to conduct repairs on one of the shaft bearings, but the squadron took advantage of even that time. Placing a small maintenance detachment ashore at Cecil Field, the Valions continued flight operations in preparation for the final push for the ORE. The tenth and final squadron aircraft completed the ACE program on 10 May; and when the squadron returned to sea on the 18th, all twelve squadron aircraft were aboard. The ORE was conducted from 24 to 26 May under the observation of RADM GEIS, Commander Fleet Air Jacksonville; and Attack Squadron FIFTEEN, living up to its motto of "None Finer", led Attack Carrier Air Wing SIX with a grade of mid-outstanding (enclosure 4). The flying was not yet over and by the time May ended the "Valions" had recorded their highest monthly flight time in their A-7 history - 857 hours.

After spending two days in Mayport, the squadron was once again at sea on the 29th of May as part of the Blue Forces in LANTREDEX 3-73. Under the command of RADM DOWNEY, Commander Cruiser Destroyer Group EIGHT, the Blue forces were opposed by a large Orange force. As simulated hostilities commenced, the Valions led CVW-SIX in locating and destroying every major Orange unit. This included the French carrier FOCH. Later in the exercise, four Valion Aircraft carrying six MK-82 bombs each destroyed a target hull located north of Puerto Rico. The exercise ended on 6 June and the Valions returned home to Cecil Field on 8 June.

After a hectic five months of training, the pace in Attack Squadron FIFTEEN slowed during the latter half of June and the first half of July. Only one commitment was made as the squadron provided a static display and pilot for the USS ROOSEVELT's "open house" on the 4th of July. One noteworthy event that did occur was the arrival of LV Philippe BURCIER, French Navy. His arrival, made possible by the Chief of Naval Operation's Personnel Exchange Program (PEP), placed this command in the unique position of being the first and only operational

fleet squadron with a foreign exchange pilot. LV BURCIER's personality and ability complemented the squadron's organization from the very start and the only problem encountered was the ticklish situation of clearance for classified material. In this regard, LV BURCIER's own understanding of the problem was the best solution.

Tranquility is not a known state in the attack community and by the 9th of July the squadron was packing again. The Valions moved aboard the "Rusty Roosie" again on the 10th, and commenced at-sea operations on the 11th as part of the Blue forces in LANTREDEX 1-74. This exercise continued under the command of RADM MOORER, Commander Carrier Division SIX, until the 25th, when the squadron led a simulated nuclear attack against the Pinecastle Impact Range. The Valions returned to Cecil Field on the 26th of July.

With a cruise departure date looming on the horizon, Attack Squadron FIFTEEN commenced a training program that would culminate in the graded participation of pilots in competitive exercises (COMPEX). This program was designed to first "finger print" the aircraft bombing computers (CP-741), and then build up pilot proficiency in weapons delivery. Six aircraft were chosen on the basis of past system performance, and these aircraft were afforded major attention. The squadron's Weapons Verification Work Center was augmented in numbers and the pilots commenced new ground training in utilizing the CP-741. By the time the squadron commenced "compexing" on the 13th, the overall squadron circle error of probability (CEP) had been greatly reduced.

August was not all work. On 30 August, Attack Squadron FIFTEEN honored a former Valion, Commander Peter SCHOEFFEL. Commander SCHOEFFEL was serving as the operations officer in VA-15 when he was shot down over North Vietnam. After spending six years in a POW status, Commander SCHOEFFEL was returned with other POW's during the spring. The party was a tribute to the man's courage and honor.

Delivering ordnance, flying in close formation, the Valions displayed their airmanship in a demonstration for dependents aboard the USS ROOSEVELT on the 6th of September. This performance was followed up the next day with a full day and night of refresher landings which requalified all the pilots. Then on the tenth of September the squadron completed its final move of 1973. On the 14th of September, Attack Squadron FIFTEEN commenced its fourteenth Mediterranean deployment. The long Atlantic crossing was broken with flight operations north of the Azores on the 21st and with a brief stop in Rota to "turn-over" with the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY. The ship passed Gibraltar late on the 25th, conducted two days of flight operations and entered the port of Barcelona on the 29th.

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Valion history for the last quarter of the year can be written with the simple words "Middle East Crisis". When the war broke between the Arabs and Israelis, the squadron was enjoying Barcelona, its first liberty port in the Mediterranean. Soon after the initial dispatches on the war began to arrive, the USS ROOSEVELT cancelled all leave and liberty as she assumed an alert posture that would allow her to get underway within four hours. Secure in this alert status, the ship and crew then swung at anchor for the next three days until the ship was ordered to get underway on the tenth. The time at anchor was not lost time, however. Contingency plans were borken out, reviewed, and up-dated. Squadron tactics were carefully reviewed toward application to the new situation, and new planning was initiated.

When the squadron commenced operations on the tenth, the primary goal was to quickly bring all pilots back up to "speed" in basic airmanship after the inport period. As this was accomplished, more attention was devoted to squadron/air wing tactics. This was all accomplished as the ship slowly moved station from south of Sardinia to south of Sicily.

(C) In this latter position, the USS ROOSEVELT became one of the focal points in Operation Nickle-Grass, the priority movement of A-4 aircraft from the United States to Israel. Her position in the middle of the Mediterranean served as the recovery/launch position for the transiting A-4 aircraft. The squadron played a key role in this operation also by providing most of the personnel on a hastily organized maintenance detachment. These five Valions, relying on their previous A-4 experience, ensured the ultimate success of the operation by providing 100 percent aircraft availability. For the long hours worked to attain this success, each man was commended by Commander, Attack Carrier Air Wing SIX. (Enclosure 5)

With the completion of Operation Nickle-Grass, the carrier joined the USS INDEPENDENCE and other units of the Sixth Fleet south of Crete. As part of this large force, Attack Squadron FIFTEEN played a key role in the three objectives of the Sixth Fleet. First, we were an integral part of the force-in-being to counter the large Soviet naval buildup. Second, we were tasked to monitor the airborne resupply effort of the Soviets, and thirdly, we were ready to assist in the protection and evacuation of American citizens throughout the Middle East. In support of these objectives the squadron flew more than 314 sorties and intercepted many Russian transports crossing the Mediterranean west and south of Crete. (Enclosure 6) These operations were carried out twenty-four hours a day as the three carriers (ROOSEVELT, INDEPENDENCE, and KENNEDY) conducted flight operations on a rotational basis of

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12 hours of flying, 24 hours off. This round the clock flying continued until the USS INDEPENDENCE entered port in early November and the situation in the Middle East stabilized. If the squadron was not actually flying, then two aircraft were maintained in an alert status to respond to any surface threat.

(C) The huge Soviet resupply effort which forced our attack pilots into the fighter role provided valuable training in our secondary mission area, air-to-air combat. Both the pilots and the planes proved to be quite adept at making timely identification intercepts. Normal configuration for these aircraft were two AIM-9G, Sidewinder missiles, and 400 rounds of 20 MM ammunition. When conducting surface patrol or standing alert duty, the aircraft were configured the same way with an additional four Rock-eye bombs added. At night one SUU-44 flare pod was also loaded. The A-7 proved itself again to be a capable and versatile aircraft.

When the Valions entered Athens, their second port of the cruise, they had been at sea for thirty-six days in what is a modern record for Mediterranean deployments. During this period of time the squadron had accumulated 918 hours and 514 sorties. Admiral D. J. MURPHY, Commander Sixth Fleet, acknowledged this unusual effort in a personal letter to Navy dependents (enclosure 7). Commander Guy CANE, Commander Attack Carrier Air Wing SIX, also acknowledged the tremendous effort of the Valions Maintenance Department when he presented the CVW-SIX Maintenance Award to the squadron for the September-October period. Perhaps the most important recognition, however, went to LV BURCIER. Restricted from operational flights involving the carriage of live ordnance during the Middle East Crisis, LV BURCIER had flown 15 straight sorties as the air-to-air refueling tanker. For this meritorious achievement, the other squadron pilots presented LV BURCIER with an "Esso" patch and named him the tanker pilot of the year.

Throughout late November and early December, the squadron bounced back and forth between Athens and the operating area southwest of Crete, commonly called "Camel Station". Operations were now routine patrols designed to ensure superiority and control of both the sea and the air. This continued until the ship sailed west to Barcelona for the holidays. During this period of time the squadron received notification of awards for previous performance. Commander Naval Air Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, VADM E. H. MICHAELIS, cited the squadron for its accident free flight year (enclosure 8); and the Secretary of the Navy awarded the

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ship and air wing the Meritorious Unit Commendation for their service in the Mediterranean in 1972 (enclosure 9). The VA-15 basketball team continued their championship ways by winning the Navy Basketball tournament held at NAVCOMMSTA, Nea Makri (enclosure 10) and were designated to represent the "afloat" forces in the Navy tournament to be held in January in Rota, Spain.

Originally the squadron had been scheduled to participate in a charter flight program during the holidays. This program would have brought flights of dependents to Barcelona and returned the aircraft to the States with servicemen. As the Middle East Crisis caused schedule change upon change, the charter flight was finally abandoned and people sought to make other arrangements. In spite of all obstacles, a large number of dependents did visit Barcelona and approximately 21 officers and men returned to the States for the holidays. For them, the year had a happy ending.