A HISTORY OF MARINE ATTACK SQUADRON 311

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

A flight of A-4Es in formation over San Diego, California. Clearly seen are the VMA-311 matrix letters WL on the vertical stabilizer and the squadron insignia on the fuselage. (USMC Photo A422813)

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By
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FOREWORD

In this publication the history of Marine Attack Squadron 311 is traced from its commissioning in December 1942 through three wars and several evolutions during which the unit made the transition from a fighting squadron flying propeller-driven planes to a modern attack squadron equipped with high-performance jet aircraft. The history was prepared principally from primary sources such as command diaries and chronologies, published historical works, and recollections of Marines involved.

Major William J. Sambito, a graduate of Colby College in Waterville, Maine, was commissioned in 1961 and designated a naval aviator in 1965. Between December 1966 and June 1971, he served two tours in the Western Pacific as a transport helicopter pilot. Major Sambito joined the staff of the History and Museums Division in January 1975 after attending the Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia.

It is hoped that the information contained herein will provide some insight into the development and employment of VMA-311 over the past three decades. The History and Museums Division welcomes any comments on the narrative and additional information or illustrations which might enhance a future edition.

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Brigadier General, U. S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

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15 June 1978

PREFACE

Marine Attack Squadron 311 was conceived as a "Fighting Squadron" during the rapid build up of forces which followed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The squadron participated in World War II and was assigned occupational duty in Japan upon cessation of hostilities. During the Korean conflict, the squadron again saw combat, this time as a jet fighter squadron. When Marine air was committed in Vietnam, VMA-311 was one of the first attack squadrons to deploy to Vietnam and one of the last to leave. While this history deals with one particular squadron, it exemplifies the many Marine squadrons whose development and employment parallel that of VMA-311.

A debt of gratitude is owed to those who reviewed the manuscript and provided valuable comments. These include Lieutenant General Thomas H. Miller, USMC; Major General Arthur A. Adams, USMC (Ret); Major General Paul H. Fontana, USMC (Ret); Brigadier General Henry W. Hise, USMC (Ret); Brigadier General Manning T. Jannell, USMC; Colonel James E. Johnson, USMC (Ret); Colonel Neil R. MacIntyre, USMC (Ret); Colonel John H. Miller, USMC; Colonel Michael R. Yunck, USMC (Ret); Lieutenant Colonel Ray D. Rushlow, USMC (Ret); and Lieutenant Colonel Samuel P. Brutcher, USMC, who not only conducted an indepth review of the history, but also provided assistance in understanding some of the technical material.

Without the assistance of the professionals in the Marine Corps Historical Division, the completion of this document would have been impossible. In this regard I extend my appreciation to Miss Gabrielle M. Neufeld and Mrs. Joyce E. Bonnett for their help in collecting source material and to the members of the Historical Branch who edited the manuscript. Thanks are also extended to the manuscript typist, Miss Catherine A. Stoll, and the publication production editor, Mr. Douglas Johnston. The pictures contained in this publication are from the Marine Corps Photo Archives and the personal collections of Brigadier General Hise, Colonel Yunck, and Lieutenant Colonel Brutcher.

WILLIAM J. SAMBITO
Major, U. S. Marine Corps

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Introduction

On 6 December 1941, Marine Corps aviation consisted of two aircraft wings—the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) commanded by Brigadier General Roy S. Geiger, headquartered at Marine Base, Quantico, Virginia, and Brigadier General Ross E. Rowell's 2d Marine Aircraft Wing with its headquarters at the Naval Air Station, San Diego, California. Although the Marine Corps could boast of two aircraft wings, the total strength of the 1st MAW consisted solely of the six squadrons of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 11 while the 2d MAW similarly included only one group, MAG-21, located on the island of Oahu in the Territory of Hawaii. Of the six MAG-21 squadrons, four were at bases on Oahu and two were on board carriers, except for a detachment on Wake Island. With the addition of Marine Scouting Squadron 3, stationed at Bourne Field, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, the Marine Corps had a total of 13 aircraft squadrons, 204 aircraft, and 5,866 aviation personnel.[1]

On 7 December 1941, disaster struck the Territory of Hawaii when Japanese carrier aircraft attacked the U. S. fleet at Pearl Harbor. The Marine Corps Air Station at Ewa, 10 miles west of Pearl Harbor, received extensive damage and all but one of MAG-21's aircraft were either destroyed or damaged. Six hours later and 1,994 nautical miles to the west, Japanese bombers from Kwajalein struck Wake Island destroying 7 of the 12 Grumman F4F Wildcats assigned to the forward echelon of Marine Fighting Squadron 211.

After one day of war, the entire 2d MAW had been reduced to only 40 operational aircraft. The Marine Corps began rebuilding immediately. By September 1944, Marine Corps aviation attained its peak strength of 5 aircraft wings, which included 31 aircraft groups and 145 tactical squadrons. By 31 January 1945, Marine aviation personnel reached a peak strength of 125,162.[2]

Marine Attack Squadron 311 is one of many commands which were established during this rapid expansion in World War II. This squadron, originally commissioned as Marine Fighting Squadron 311, was born of war and baptized in the islands of the Pacific. It later met the challenge of Korea and carried forth its legend to Vietnam.

From Birth to War: 1941-1945

Marine Fighting Squadron 311 (VMF-311) was commissioned on 1 December 1942 with Major Ralph K. Rottet as its first commanding officer. The fledgling squadron was assigned to the newly activated 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW) and headquartered at the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina. At the time of commissioning, a total of 2 officers and 64 enlisted men comprised the skeletal organization of the squadron.[1]

Major Rottet, who later rose to the rank of lieutenant general, graduated from the Naval Academy in 1934 and completed Basic School at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1935. In July 1937 he completed flight school at Pensacola, Florida, and was designated at Naval Aviator. During the next 3 years, then Lieutenant Rottet served at the Naval Air Station, San Diego, California. He then returned to Pensacola where he was assigned as a flight in-

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USMC Photo 131733

The F4U-1 Corsair by Vought was the pride of the squadron. VMF-311 first received Corsairs at Page Field, Parris Island, in April of 1943, before being sent to the war in the Pacific.

structor until October 1941. After a 1-year tour with the Bureau of Aeronautics in Washington, D.C., Major Rottet was assigned the task of building VMF-311 into an operational squadron.

The 3d MAW, activated in November 1942, was given the mission of preparing squadrons for deployment and training replacement pilots for combat squadrons. Dozens of returning aviators who had learned their lessons over Guadalcanal were assigned the task of teaching new pilots "how it was on the Canal." To do this 3d MAW acquired 11 additional training fields located throughout North and South Carolina. Even though there were 4,989 Marine pilots by 1 July 1943, the cry was always "more."[2]

The building of VMF-311 during this period of pell-mell expansion was difficult because the squadron remained in a constant state of flux with Marines continually transferring in and out of the command. Difficulties were accentuated by the frequent change of commanding officers due to the rotation of officers to the Wing Headquarters Squadron and to the headquarters of a new aircraft group forming, MAG-31. Major Rottet retained command until 31 January 1943, then became the first commanding officer of MAG-31. During the month of February, the squadron had four commanding officers, three second lieutenants and one captain. Nevertheless, in the 4 $^1/_2$ months that the squadron remained at Cherry Point, the essentials of organization were completed.[3]

During this period the squadron was assigned 12 North American SNJ Texans for training in fighter tactics, gunnery, and night flying. The two-seated Texan, an advanced trainer, had two .30 caliber machineguns in the fuselage synchronized to fire through its two-bladed propeller. The aircraft, powered by a 500-horsepower Pratt and Whitney engine, had a maximum airspeed of 205 miles per hour at 5000 feet. Because of its ease of handling and maneuverability, the Texan proved to be an excellent trainer.[4]

On 18 April 1943, under the command of Captain Jack D. Kane, VMF-311 was relocated to Page Field at Parris Island, South Carolina, where the unit started receiving the new Vought F4U-1 Corsair to

replace the SNJs. The single-seated F4U fighter with its 2000-horsepower Pratt and Whitney engine was originally developed as a fleet aircraft, but was initially rejected by the Navy as a carrier plane. The Corsair was capable of speeds up to 400 miles per hour and had excellent maneuverability and handling characteristics. Its armament consisted of six .50 caliber machineguns, three in each wing, with 400 rounds per gun belted in various fashions to utilize the combined effect of tracers, armor piercing, and incendiary bullets. The Corsair also carried one centerline fuel tank or a 1000-pound bomb. This aircraft, dubbed "Whistling Death" by the Japanese, was the beginning of a new era in Marine Corps aviation.[5] By the end of June 1943, 15 Corsairs were assigned to VMF-311 and all SNJs were transferred from the squadron.

On 1 June, VMF-311 greeted a new commanding officer, Major Harry B. Hooper. This time the squadron had a skipper who would remain in command for an extended period of time and thereby provided the leadership stability the unit had lacked. Major Hooper enlisted in the Marine Corps in March 1940 and was accepted for flight training. In January 1941, he received his naval aviator wings and was commissioned a second lieutenant. He would remain on active duty for 22 years, retiring with the rank of colonel.

The squadron continued training while acquiring more Marines. During August 1943, full strength was finally reached with a total complement of 45 officers and 243 enlisted men including 8 enlisted naval corpsmen.[6] On 31 August, the squadron, now with 18 F4U-1Cs, began the first leg of a journey that would take it to the homeland of the Imperial Japanese Empire. From 31 August to 8 September, the squadron was en route to the Marine Corps Air Depot (MCAD) Miramar, California. The Corsairs were ferried to the west coast by the squadron pilots and a Douglas R4D Skytrain carried the engineering officer and nine engineering personnel. The remainder of the squadron went by train. The ferry flight began uneventfully, but on 4 September, shortly after takeoff from Shreveport, Louisiana, en route to Midland, Texas, the Corsairs encountered a severe and widespread storm. The flight became scattered and one aviator, Captain Rufus E. Garret, was killed when his plane crashed at Fort Worth, Texas.[7]

The squadron air echelon arrived at MCAD Miramar without further mishap and the squadron joined Marine Fleet Air, West Coast (MFAWC). Four additional F4Us were transferred to the unit and final preparations were made as VMF-311 awaited the ships that would take it to the Pacific.

Meanwhile, MAG-31 with its three squadrons, VMF-321 and Marine Scout Bombing Squadrons (VMSB) 331 and 334, also had crossed the country and was now awaiting further transportation. On 25 September, the air echelons of MAG-31, including the 21 F4Us of VMF-311, embarked on board the escort carrier USS *Nassau* (CVE 10) and sailed west.

Five days later, the ground echelons followed on board the U. S. Army Transport Ship *Puebla*. On 30 September 1943, VMF-311 was detached from MFAWC and again became part of Colonel Calvin R. Freeman's MAG-31. On 5 October the *Nassau* arrived at Pago Pago, Tutuila, Samoa. The following day as the carrier lay at the dock, the squadron Corsairs were catapulted from the deck and landed at the Samoa Naval Station in what was one of the earliest American catapult operations involving the F4U.

The same day, MAG-31 became a subordinate command of the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing (MBDAW) which was activated at MCAS Ewa on 22 August 1942 in recognition of the defensive roles of MAG-13 in Samoa, MAG-21 at Ewa, and MAG-22 on Midway. In August 1943, the headquarters of the 4th MBDAW moved from Ewa to Tutuila; by October the wing consisted of MAG-13, MAG-31, and MAG-24.[8]

On 8 October, the squadron's aircraft were flown to the Seabee-constructed field on Wallis Island and were joined there 11 days later by the ground echelon on board the *Puebla*. Wallis Island, a small French protectorate 186 miles west of Pago Pago, was by no means a Pacific paradise; the volcanic island was small, flat, hot, and damp. The squadron stayed at Wallis until January 1944 with only a 3-week break in December when all planes and pilots went to Samoa for fighter director training conducted by MAG-31.

Marine aviation in Samoa had a purely defensive mission. The pilots of VMF-311 were involved in constant patrols and alerts, chasing unidentified aircraft that inevitably turned out to be friendly.[9] Although the squadron made no contact with the enemy during the period, one pilot, First Lieutenant William S. Robson, Jr., was killed when his aircraft, after flying into clouds at 6,000 feet, went into a spin and crashed in the ocean.[10]

As the Japanese-held islands within striking distance of Samoa fell and the perimeter of the span of Japanese control decreased, the 4th MBDAW, now with MAG-31, -13, and -22, left Wallis Island and moved 2,000 miles northwest to the Marshall Islands.

On 26 January 1944, the squadron, less the air echelon, began loading in the landing ship tank USS *Typhoon* (LST 1118) and the merchant ship USS *Constantine* and sailed 4 days later for Roi-Namur Islands, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands. The ships arrived at Roi-Namur, the small twin islands on the northern perimeter of the Kwajalein Atoll, on 6 February and on the following day the squadron's advance party went ashore.

Since Roi and Namur are joined by a narrow strip of land, the two islands are often considered as one. A three-runway Japanese airfield was located on Roi while the support and billeting facilities were located on Namur. Because the runway surfaces and airfield facilities were severely damaged during the battle for the island, it was necessary for two Seabee battalions to prepare the area before the Corsairs could land from Wallis.[11]

The 4th Marine Division had secured Roi-Namur just 5 days before the forward echelon of MAG-31 and VMF-311 arrived. Kwajalein Island, 50 miles to the south, had been secured by the Army's 7th Infantry Division 3 days after Roi-Namur. MAG-13, meanwhile, with the aid of the Seabees, was establishing residency 250 miles away on the island of Majuro. While mopping-up operations were still being conducted on Engebi Island, Eniwetok Atoll, MAG-22 landed its advanced echelon and began preparations for future operations.[12]

The mission for the Marines in the Marshalls now was to isolate the Japanese on the bypassed islands, deny their escape, and prevent them from using any of the airstrips on the numerous islands in the Marshalls. These rearguard Marines would also have to protect the vital lines of communication between the United States and the forward areas.

The VMF-311 personnel on Roi began setting up large pyramidal tents. The general unloading of supplies and equipment proceeded satisfactorily until about 0230 on 12 February when the island was attacked by enemy bombers. The 12 to 14 Japanese bombers, which had flown approximately 550 miles from Ponape in the Caroline Islands, struck with accuracy and effectiveness. VMF-311 took a heavy pounding, suffering casualties of 14 officers and 99 enlisted men wounded. Warrant Officer John H. Spotanski, the ground defense officer, Corporal Claude S. Gibbs III, and Privates Albert B. Healy and John H. Nancy were hit seriously enough to require evacuation to the *Typhoon*. The enemy attack, which hit a bomb dump and caused numerous secondary explosions and fires, severely damaged a substantial amount of the squadron's equipment and supplies. All tents and personal gear were destroyed, making living conditions quite primitive for the next 10 days.[13]

A decision was then made to move the squadron from Roi to Kwajalein Island. After an uncomfortable stay of 16 days, the personnel on Roi were loaded in an LST and landed at Kwajalein on 24 February. Five days later they were joined by the air echelon which arrived from Wallis Island.

Kwajalein Atoll, the largest coral atoll in the world, forms a lagoon measuring nearly 65 miles in length and reaches a maximum width of 18 miles. The crescent shaped island of Kwajalein, the largest island of the atoll, measures slightly more than 2 miles in length and 400 yards at its widest point. Before the U. S. bombardment and assault of the island, the Japanese had built numerous installations and had an airfield under construction. Now through the efforts of the Seabees, the field became the new home of MAG-31 and VMF-311.

During March the 10 fighter and bomber squadrons of the 4th MBDAW began their long, unrelenting attacks on the bypassed atolls of Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit. Before the arrival of Marine aviation in the Marshalls, the Seventh Air Force had pounded these atolls for 4 months and Navy carrier aircraft had flown 1,671 sorties against them. Although the VMF-311 pilots encountered no aerial opposition, they were surprised to meet accurate and intense antiaircraft fire indicating that the tons of bombs dropped since November 1943 had not eliminated all resistance.[14]

The forces attacking the bypassed Japanese positions also had the duty of protecting their own rear areas. Because of the demonstrated use of suicidal tactics by the Japanese, one-way sorties had to be regarded as a possible enemy action.

> If a few planes had sneaked into the Marshalls, the Japanese could not have changed the course of the war, but they could have upset plans and timetables and socked the U.S. Fleet with heavy casualties.[15]

On 23 March 1944, the squadron made its first strike, a strafing attack against antiaircraft emplacements and a radio station on Wotje Island. The

flight was comprised of five VMSB-231 scout bombers and one VMF-311 Corsair flying escort. As the scout bombers began their dives, the fighter delivered suppressive fires pulling out at approximately 300 feet and 380 knots. Three bombs hit the radio station and one hit an antiaircraft gun. No enemy fire was encountered and the flight returned home safely. The following day 12 F4Us accompanied five scout bombers for a continuation of the attack on Wotje. This time the enemy responded with small caliber antiaircraft fire, but no aircraft were hit.[16]

Before the squadron could become too comfortable in its new surroundings, word was received to move back to Roi. The move began on 26 March and was completed on 4 April. During this period the Corsairs continued their strikes against Wotje.

On 29 March, the Japanese antiaircraft gunners scored their first hits; two F4Us received minor damage. The following week the commanding officer, Major Hooper, experienced engine difficulties during a strafing run and was forced to ditch his plane. After about 2 hours in a raft, a destroyer picked him up and returned him to Kwajalein.[17] On 23 April misfortune struck again when First Lieutenant Frederick C. Hawkes, who had just joined the squadron on 1 April, was killed when his plane was observed to lose airspeed in a turn then spin and crash into the ocean off Kwajalein.[18]

Until May 1944, the strikes flown were predominantly strafing attacks, but occasionally an aircraft would carry a 1,000-pound general purpose bomb. On 14 May the first squadron bombing mission was flown and from then on the Corsairs' mission was primarily bombing attacks, although strafing runs were frequently made on the targets after the bombs were dropped. The aircraft were loaded with 250-, 500-, or 1,000-pound bombs.

Because of the ineffectiveness of level-flight single-bomb delivery and the lack of documentation or standardization associated with dive bombing in the Corsair, the pilots began developing a technique which would increase the probability of damage with a single bomb:

> At first "clean dives"* were made with the indicated air speed as high as 380 knots, then for a period of about a month, the diving brakes were used in an attempt to improve accuracy with slower air speed, bomb release at lower altitudes, and greater aircraft stability. Results, however, did not seem to justify subjecting pilots and aircraft to the increased hazard of antiaircraft fire experienced when flying low and slow, and this technique was abandoned. All dives were again clean and each pilot, knowing his angle of dive and the direction of the wind, developed his own technique for accuracy.[19]

The experimentation and lessons learned would prove very valuable in the future.

On 26 May 1944, First Lieutenant George W. Diemer, Jr., was killed during a takeoff from Kwajalein. Lieutenant Diemer's aircraft settled back onto the runway after the landing gear was retracted and the plane continued into the water off the end of the runway.[20]

During June and July the squadron attacked Maloelap, Wotje, and Taroa as the campaign to neutralize the Marshalls continued. July brought another loss, the first directly attributable to enemy action. Captain Michael J. Curran, Jr., while engaged in a strike at Wotje on 30 July, was hit by antiaircraft fire and was seen trailing smoke as he crashed into the sea 500 yards from shore.[21]*

From August through January 1945, air operations in the Marshalls continued, and VMF-311 expanded its area of operation to include the atolls of Mille and Jaluit. The job was tiresome and monotonous, but the Marines assigned these rear area tasks performed their duties faithfully if not always cheerfully.[22]

On 24 October 1944, Major Hooper, who had led the squadron to war in the Pacific, passed command to Major Charles M. Kunz, who all too soon was faced with the unwanted task of having to report another casualty. One week after the change of command, Second Lieutenant Frank T. Sweeney, while flying his first combat mission, was hit by antiaircraft fire while on a bombing run over Enidj Island. Lieutenant Sweeney was observed bailing out of his Corsair at about 4,000 feet, but he was never found.[23]

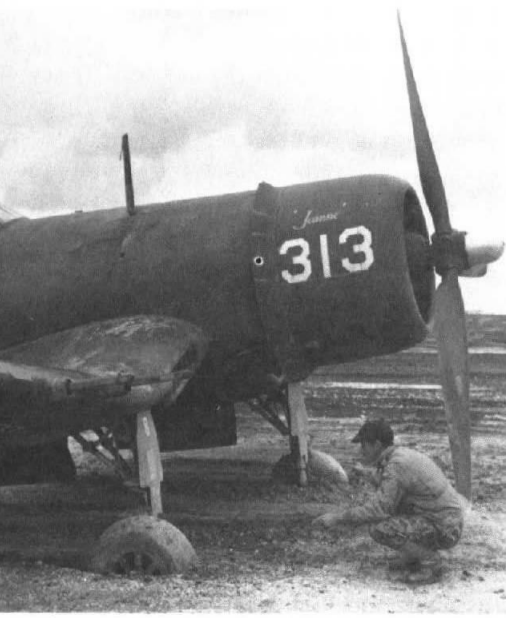
Major Kunz retained command until he was relieved by Major Perry L. Shuman on 11 February 1945. Soon after this change of command another pilot, Second Lieutenant John H. Newton, was killed when his plane crashed at sea during a routine training flight.[24]

The task of guarding the rear ended in March of

*Clean dive is the aircraft configured for a dive with landing gear up, flaps up, dive brakes up, and canopy closed, thereby reducing drag.

*Curran commanded VMF-311 as a second lieutenant from 16-25 February 1943, during the squadron's initial organizational period.

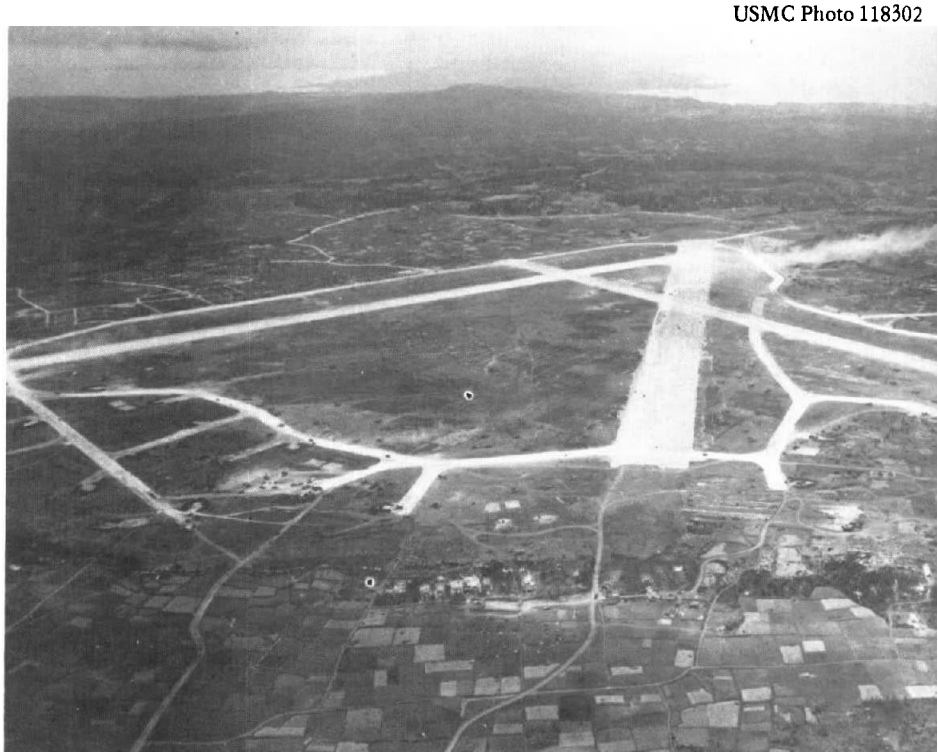
USMC Photo 117900



USMC Photo 118387

A closeup view of Marine Corsairs parked at Yontan Airfield, Okinawa, (top) and an aerial view of the same field in April 1945 (below). The picture looks northwest with the China Sea in the background. The airfield was either a bowl of black dust or a quagmire of mud, such as that encountered by the Marine Corsair on the left.

USMC Photo 118302



1945, and the personnel of VMF-311 gladly prepared to vacate their home in the Marshalls for the chance to move forward to the Emperor's backyard—Okinawa. The squadron began loading new F4U-1C aircraft on board the escort carriers USS *Sitkoh Bay* (CVE 86) and the USS *Breton* (CVE 23) on 8 March. Three days later the ships sailed and MAG-31 became part of the 2d MAW under the Tenth Army Tactical Air Force (TAF). The F4U-1C, a modification to the basic Corsair, contained four 20 millimeter cannon, two in each wing, and four pairs of small pylons for attaching 5-inch rockets.

It was determined early that the land-based squadrons in Okinawa comprising the TAF would be commanded by a Marine flyer. The job went to Major General Francis P. Mulcahy. The TAF consisted of MAGs-31, -33, -22, and -14 as well as three Army Air Forces fighter groups.[25]

The forward echelon of Marine Fighting Squadron 311, on board an LST, arrived off the coast of Okinawa opposite Yontan Airfield on the afternoon of 2 April 1945. On the morning of 4 April, just 3 days after the initial assault landings, Major Shuman, with a detail of 20 officers and men, went ashore to survey the area assigned to the squadron, set up temporary camp facilities, and plan for the disposition of supplies and equipment. Unloading operations started the following morning and continued day and night until the task was completed.[26]

On 7 April the squadron aircraft flew from the two carriers to the former Japanese airfield at Yontan. During the launch, one division of planes, while flying combat air patrol (CAP) over the carrier group to cover subsequent launching, was vectored toward a possible enemy aircraft. The pilots quickly identified the target as friendly, but at the same time they noticed a Japanese Lil* at 500 feet heading directly toward the carriers. Because of the low altitude of the bomber, it was obvious that the Japanese pilot was not planning any orthodox bomb belivery. His collision course with the *Sitkoh Bay* identified him as a Kamikaze.**

With two divisions now airborne, the Corsairs immediately attacked the enemy plane. On the first pass, Captain Ralph G. McCormick scored hits in the fuselage and engines, and First Lieutenant Robert T. Vaught with Second Lieutenant James F. Keegan on his wing also hit the fuselage with cannon fire. First Lieutenant John J. Doherty then scored hits in both engines. First Lieutenant Organ E. McCullough, Jr., rolled in next and put several hits in the Lil's nose section. The Kamikaze started to burn, but continued straight for the *Sitkoh Bay*. The carrier began firing, but the Lil was already on its way down and just 50 feet short of the carrier the Lil ended its final flight.[27]

This was the first time the squadron had engaged enemy aircraft. Captain McCormick and Lieutenant Doherty had the honor of sharing the first kill, as well as the distinction of being the first VMF-311 pilots to use successfully the F4U modified with the 20mm cannon. It was not long before all the pilots had the chance to try the cannons and as expected, were "very enthusiastic about the great destructive power of the armament."[28]

While the story of the first squadron kill was being retold, the opportunity quickly arose for other pilots to develop their own "sea stories." On 16 April, while flying CAP for two radar picket ships, a flight of four squadron Corsairs discovered aerial engagement was vastly different from the bombing and strafing missions of the Marshalls. An extract from the squadron's war dairy describes this aerial encounter:

> About 35 miles from the picket ship, Captain Gilman B. Rood and his wingman First Lieutenant Thomas M. Kirby sighted a Val*** flying low toward the picket ship. Kirby led the attack and smoked her. Rood's first run caused no damage. He closed again, shot the right wing off and the Val flamed, disintegrated, and splashed. First Lieutenant Raymond M. Barrett and First Lieutenant Norman A. Turley sighted a Betty**** and seven Vals heading towards a picket ship. Many other friendly aircraft were present and a general melee ensued. Barrett made a run on a Val which disintegrated and splashed. As he recovered, a plane from VMF-441 flashed in front of him from below and Barrett's propeller chewed the tail off. The pilot bailed out and got into his raft. Barrett

*Lil or Lily was an American name for the Japanese twin-engined Kawasaki light bomber. The Lil was equipped with 1,150-hp engines and was capable of flying 233 knots at sea level.

**Kamikaze is Japanese for "divine wind," an action taken by certain Japanese pilots in which they crashed their aircraft against Allied targets. The airplanes were often laden with explosives.

***Val—The Japanese single-engine Aichi carrier bomber with a two-man crew was capable of flying 200 knots at sea level. This plane had two 7.7mm guns and carried one 550-pound bomb.

****Betty—The two-engine Japanese bomber could carry a 2,000-pound bomb payload and had two 20mm guns. This plane had a range of 2,200 miles and a speed of 248 knots at sea level.

waited until the downed pilot had been sighted by rescue vessels. Turley spotted a Val making a dive for a picket ship and made a run on her. The Val, under the impact of four 20 millimeter guns of the F4U-1C, promptly blew up and splashed close by the picket ship.[29]

Later the same day, a section of two VMF-311 aircraft spotted two Vals and after a brief exchange of fire the score for the day became: VMF-311—5; Japanese—0.

Throughout the month of April the squadron continued flying combat air patrol missions, and on 28 April, 13 more Japanese aircraft were added to 311's growing record. By the end of April, 22 enemy aircraft had been destroyed with the squadron's only loss occurring on 30 April. First Lieutenant William K. Ouellette, while flying near a U. S. destroyer, was mistaken for an enemy pilot and was shot down and killed.[30]

May proved to be as exciting as the previous month as the determination of the fanatical enemy tested the skill of every pilot. On 4 May a total of 60 enemy aircraft were shot down by Okinawa-based flyers, and VMF-311 got its share as it tallied 17 kills. Second Lieutenant William P. Brown led the squadron with four enemy planes shot down. By the end of the month, the squadron had topped April's score with a total of 37 enemy aircraft destroyed.[31]

By mid-spring, improvements to the Okinawa camp meant a new way of life for the men at Yontan Airfield. Movies were shown periodically and a recreational area was completed, which served as a diversion from the routine of combat operations. Of all the improvements, the construction of cold water shower facilities was regarded as the most significant step in making the existence on Okinawa more civilized.

On 24 May, the Japanese suicidal efforts reached a new level of daring. Immediately following a small-scale bombing attack on the airfield at about 2100, the enemy succeeded in landing one of several twin-engine bombers loaded with heavily armed troops in the middle of the main runway. Before any opposition could be organized, the Japanese, perhaps 15 in number, scattered and started destroying aircraft dispersed on the field. Several of the enemy worked their way into the squadron parking area, but before they could do any serious damage, they were killed by squadron ground personnel who had been preparing for morning operations.[32]

Weather conditions throughout the month were the most hazardous ever encountered, even for the most experienced pilots. Ground winds of 30 knots

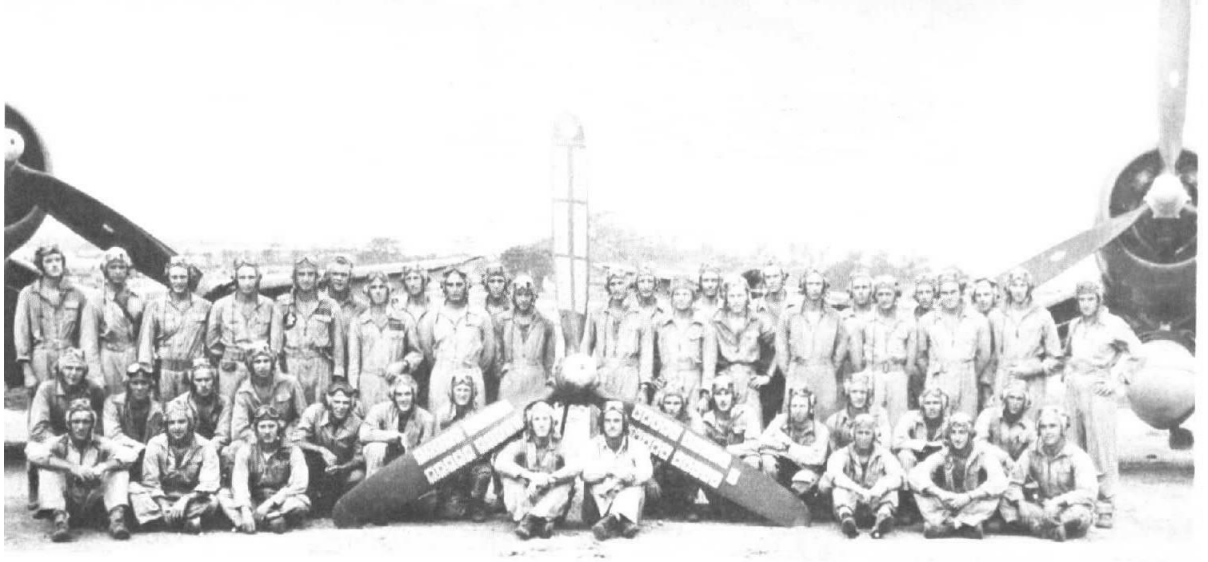
USMC Photo 707811

Major Michael R. Yunck, commanding officer of VMF-311 on Okinawa, 1945. Major Yunck was a World War II ace and the winner of two Silver Stars.

were common, and winds aloft were frequently as high as 80 knots. For almost a quarter of the time ceilings were below 1,000 feet and many landings were made in driving rains with negligible visibility. The last 5 days of the month were filled with a very wet 7 1/2 inches of rain.

Marine Fighting Squadron 311 got off to a good start in June with eight enemy aircraft destroyed in the first 11 days, bringing the squadron total for the Okinawa operation to 67. Good hunting, however, ended abruptly and, to the profound disgust of all hands, not a sign of a Japanese aircraft was seen during the rest of the month. Despite the lull in the fighting, the squadron lost a pilot on 11 June when Second Lieutenant Wilfred W. Wilhide went down at sea after experiencing an engine failure.[33]

Four days after Lieutenant Wilhide's accident, the battle-weary pilots of VMF-311 were relieved by replacement pilots from the States, and Major Michael R. Yunck assumed command of VMF-311. Major Yunck, who retired in 1967 as a colonel, was a World War II ace and the winner of two Silver Stars. In 1963 he was selected as the second recipient of the Alfred A. Cunningham trophy as the Marine Aviator of the Year. Among the several achievements cited in the award was the setting of a cross-country speed record in a McDonald F-4B Phantom when he flew, nonstop without refueling,



USMC Photo A332601

VMF-311 pilots at Chimu airfield in Okinawa, July 1945. The squadron had recently moved from Yontan to Chimu across the island.

from El Toro to Quantico in 3 hours and 50 minutes. Colonel Yunck was critically wounded in Vietnam while flying as a co-pilot in a helicopter, and as a result of these wounds his left leg was amputated.[34] A year later he returned to full duty and flight status.

Although organized resistance on Okinawa officially ceased on 22 June, sporadic fighting continued. On 28 June, First Lieutenant Eugene B. Reade was on a bombing and strafing run when enemy antiaircraft fire hit his F4U. Colonel Yunck recalls:

> Lieutenant Reade managed to get the Corsair out to sea, and made a successful water landing. He got out of the cockpit but was unable to inflate his rubber boat. He disappeared soon after the aircraft sank and was not found.[35]

The squadron was notified on 20 June that the Marine aviators would move across the island to a new airfield at Chimu, and operations from this base would begin on 1 July. "Scuttlebutt, accepted by the more gullible, pictured a fully equipped and completed camp with not only heads and a messhall, but also decked tents, hot showers, lights, and communications."[36] The ugly truth was soon known when working parties were formed and all hands were given the word that they would have the pleasure of building a beautiful camp area on a wooded slope overlooking the airfield. First, however, it would be necessary to clear the jungle from the slope before building could begin. After everyone recovered from this shock, the squadron began work and by the 30th essential facilities for handling and operating aircraft were completed.

On 2 July, the squadron participated in a fighter sweep over the Japanese home island of Kyushu. The flight consisted of eight F4Us, four from VMF-224 and four from VMF-311. The mission became anything but routine as the Corsairs arrived over Japan and passed directly over 40 enemy fighters on an opposite course. The Marine pilots immediately shifted to a defensive formation and fought their way south. Fortunately, the Corsairs managed to avoid the majority of the enemy aircraft; however, as a parting gesture to the Japanese, the flight destroyed eight enemy planes without a single loss. The two squadrons involved in the mission split the kills with four each. Two more runs to Kyushu on the 17th and the 30th failed to catch any more of the enemy in the air.[37]

On 22 July, morning and afternoon flights totaling 20 planes provided fighter cover for a cruiser task force close to the East China coast. The morning flight, after being relieved on station, flew over Wenchow in what is believed to be the first flight over China by land-based Marine aircraft since 1929.[38*]

In the slightly more than 4 months of operations on Okinawa, the squadron destroyed 71 Japanese aircraft, the second highest score of any squadron in the Tenth Army Tactical Air Force. VMF-323 took top honors with an impressive 124 kills. VMF-311's outstanding record was all the more noteworthy and gratifying in that only three pilots were lost, and not one was lost in aerial combat with the enemy.

Three pilots of the squadron distinguished themselves as Marine Corps aces: First Lieutenant William P. Brown Jr., with seven kills, Major Perry

*From 1927-1929, Fighting Plane Squadron-3M (M being the designation for Marine) and Observation Squadron-5M were attached to Major General Smedley D. Butler's 3d Brigade in Shanghai and later in Tientsin, China.

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L. Shuman with six, and Major Michael R. Yunck with five. Captain Raymond F. Scherer came close with 4½ kills. However, distinction was not limited to these men alone—for it outstanding performance in the Okinawa Campaign, VMF-311, as part of the 2d MAW, was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.[39]

With 3 weeks of good weather, and more time available, the squadron camp was well established by the end of the month. Facilities included a messhall with a machine which produced ice cream twice a week, showers, an open air theater with movies every night, and a collection of enlisted men's tents with decks and porches.[40]

On 15 August 1945, announcement was made of the cessation of hostilities with Japan. The end came with startling suddenness following the use of the atomic bomb and the entry of Russia into the war with Japan. Pilots had flown the regular schedule of CAP flights each day and as late as the 14th the squadron had provided fighter escort for photographic missions over southern Kyushu. For several days after the 15th there was little change in the daily flight schedule of CAPs, but beginning on 22 August flying was sharply curtailed, and by 26 August all flight activity ceased for the month.[41]

Shortly after the conclusion of hostilities, the squadron was alerted to move to Japan as part of the occupation forces. The last 10 days of the month were devoted to intensive overhaul of aircraft and equipment, daily close order drills, personnel inspections, and general preparations in expectation of the word to move. By the end of the month, no definite orders had been received and the unit remained on an alert status. Finally on 9 September 1945, just 7 days after the war officially ended, 24 pilots and the squadron aircraft departed Chimu Airfield for their new base at Yokosuka, Japan.[42]

The often-used wartime phrase, "I'll see you in Toyko" became a reality for the men of the squadron as MAG-31 became the first land-based air group to operate from the Japanese homeland. The war was over and VMF-311 set about the routine task of occupational duty.[43]

Post-World War II: 1946-1950

Occupation duty in Japan brought about changes in normal flight operations. The squadron was now flying extensive search and surveillance missions to determine the status of Japanese airfields and other military installations such as POW camps. In spite of

USMC Photo A332594

VMF-311 pilots at Yokosuka, Japan, 1945. The original nickname adopted by VMF-311 was "Hell's Belles." Although this nickname remained with the squadron throughout WW II, it was used infrequently.

prevailing bad weather throughout October 1945, the squadron continued to operate using repaired Japanese support equipment to supplement its needs. By the end of the month, the pilots had flown 227 search and reconnaissance missions for a total of 434 hours. No Marines of the squadron were killed or injured during this time. The only accident was a wheels up landing on a small Japanese airfield at Koriyama. The pilot, Second Lieutenant Thaddeus Z. Machuderski, had become lost due to the weather and landed when he became low on fuel. The pilot was not injured, and with the exception of a bent prop, there was only slight damage to the plane.[1]

The life style of the men changed as recreation facilities were prepared and regular basketball competition was held. The squadron entered an enlisted team and an officers' team in the group basketball league. Old fashioned "beer musters" became more frequent for the enlisted men and a small club was opened for the officers. A limited number of men were taken to Tokyo for Sunday tours, and the Americans had the opportunity to observe the oriental way of life.[2]

A flight of VMF-311 Corsairs flying over Mount Fujiyama, Japan, in January 1946. Leading the flight is the squadron commander, Major Michael R. Yunck. USMC Photo 140147

Although the squadron was destined to remain in Japan, many of its personnel were rotated or replaced. In November the squadron acquired 16 new officers and 82 enlisted men and transferred 7 officers and 115 enlisted men.[3] In December the squadron was 3 years old. Flying continued during the month as the pilots logged 433 flight hours of which 111 hours were search and surveillance missions and the remainder were devoted to training in formation and individual combat tactics.

The arrival of the new year brought little change to the squadron's daily routine. Flight operations continued to dominate the squadron's activities. In January 1946, 776 flight hours were accumulated in the most adverse weather yet encountered by the pilots. The weather took its toll on 18 January when a flight of eight Corsairs attempted to penetrate a snow storm on the return leg of a navigation flight. First Lieutenant Leon E. Canon apparently became disoriented while flying under instrument conditions and crashed.[4]

The routine of occupational duty continued until May when MAG-31 was notified to prepare for the termination of its Japanese assignment; VMF-311 was going home.

On 20 June 1946, embarked on board the attack transport USS *San Saba* (APA 232), the Marines of MAG-31 sailed for San Diego, California. Upon their arrival on the west coast on 4 July, the squadron, still assigned to MAG-31, became part of Marine Air West Coast, at MCAS Miramar. Several squadron personnel were transferred or discharged immediately, and by 17 July, when the unit was reassigned to MAG-32, the entire squadron consisted of one officer—First Lieutenant Rupert C. Wesley, Jr., the commanding officer.[5]

On 26 September, Lieutenant Wesley moved his "squadron" to MCAS El Toro, California. The squadron remained at reduced strength until November when Major Francis E. Pierce, Jr., the new commanding officer and again the only officer, received 132 enlisted men and undertook a new mission as a maintenance and training unit. The maintenance was conducted on the Corsairs which were now collecting dust instead of combat hours. The training program established was designed to

acquaint enlisted men with the fundamentals of F4U maintenance and the maintenance of associated aircraft systems. With the redistribution of personnel within Marine aviation, this program became particularly important as squadrons were deactivated and mechanics were transferred to units with different types of aircraft.[6]

Upon the deactivation of MAG-32 on 21 April 1947, the executive officer of the group, Major Otis V. Calhoun, Jr., became the new commanding officer of VMF-311 and the squadron became part of MAG-12. By the end of June, the unit had 22 officers and 123 enlisted men. Although this number remained fairly constant over the next year, the people within the squadron continually changed as new men joined and trained personnel were transferred. The pilots assigned to the squadron followed a training syllabus consisting of ground school as well as flight instruction in formation, instruments, tactics, gunnery, bombing, and night flying.[7]

By the end of December, word was received that VMF-311 would become the first jet squadron on the west coast and the second such squadron in the Marine Corps. The first jet squadron, VMF-122, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Marion E. Carl and located at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina, had received its first McDonnell FH-1 Phantoms in March 1947.[8]

In March 1948, Master Sergeant James G. Alleman and seven other staff noncommissioned officers attended a 5-week ground maintenance course for jet aircraft held at March AFB, Riverside, California.[9] Meanwhile, the pilots were involved with a new development in the field of aerial gunnery; the use of radio-controlled drone aircraft as targets. The Air Force had been using this system for some time, but this was believed to be the first time a drone target was used by any Marine Corps aviation activity.[10]

In preparation for assuming the mission of a jet training squadron, on 15 April 1948 the squadron was detached from MAG-12 and made a separate squadron under the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, which until 1 October 1947 had been designated Marine Air West Coast.[11] Four days later, Lieutenant Colonel John P. Condon, later Major General Condon, became the squadron's 19th commanding officer.

Major General Condon was commissioned a second lieutenant upon graduation from the Naval Academy in 1934. He entered flight training at Pensacola in 1936 and was designated a naval aviator the following year. During World War II, General Condon served on Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands, Bougainville, and Okinawa. In Korea he commanded both MAG-33 and MAG-12. He was promoted to major general in 1961 and retired the following year.[12]

In preparation for the transition to jets, VMF-311 mechanics attended Air Force schools at Chanute AFB in Rantoul, Illinois, and March AFB, while several pilots received jet aircraft flight training at Williams AFB in Chandler, Arizona. Immediately after Lieutenant Colonel Condon assumed command, he and three other squadron pilots attended the 3-week course at Williams AFB and became the first Marine jet instructors on the west coast. During May and June, 23 mechanics attended a jet engine course conducted by the Allison Division of General Motors Corporation in Indianapolis, Indiana.[13]

With the necessary schooling completed, the squadron lacked just one thing—jets. Finally on 20 July 1948, two Lockheed Shooting Stars, designated the F-80B by the Air Force and TO-1 by the Navy and Marine Corps, were received, and the unit became a combination jet and propeller squadron.[14]

The TO-1 was adopted by the Navy as a single-seat jet trainer, although it was designed and built for the Air Force as an operational fighter. The aircraft, with its Allison J-33 jet engine, could accelerate to speeds up to 558 miles per hour at sea level and had a service ceiling of over 45,000 feet. An electric gyro, lead-computing gunsight with a reflex optical system* was used with the six .50 caliber nose-mounted machineguns. The TO-1 could also carry two bombs mounted on wingtip shackles in place of long-range fuel tanks.[15]

During July the unit designation was changed from "Marine Fighting Squadron" to the new designation, "Marine Fighter Squadron." In July and August additional aircraft were delivered until the squadron possessed 12 TO-1s which the pilots referred to as "slick chicks." The squadron was now ready to begin training Marine mechanics in the rudiments of jet propulsion and jet engine maintenance while the west coast pilots were all looking for the chance to attend VMF-311's ground school and flight program.[16]

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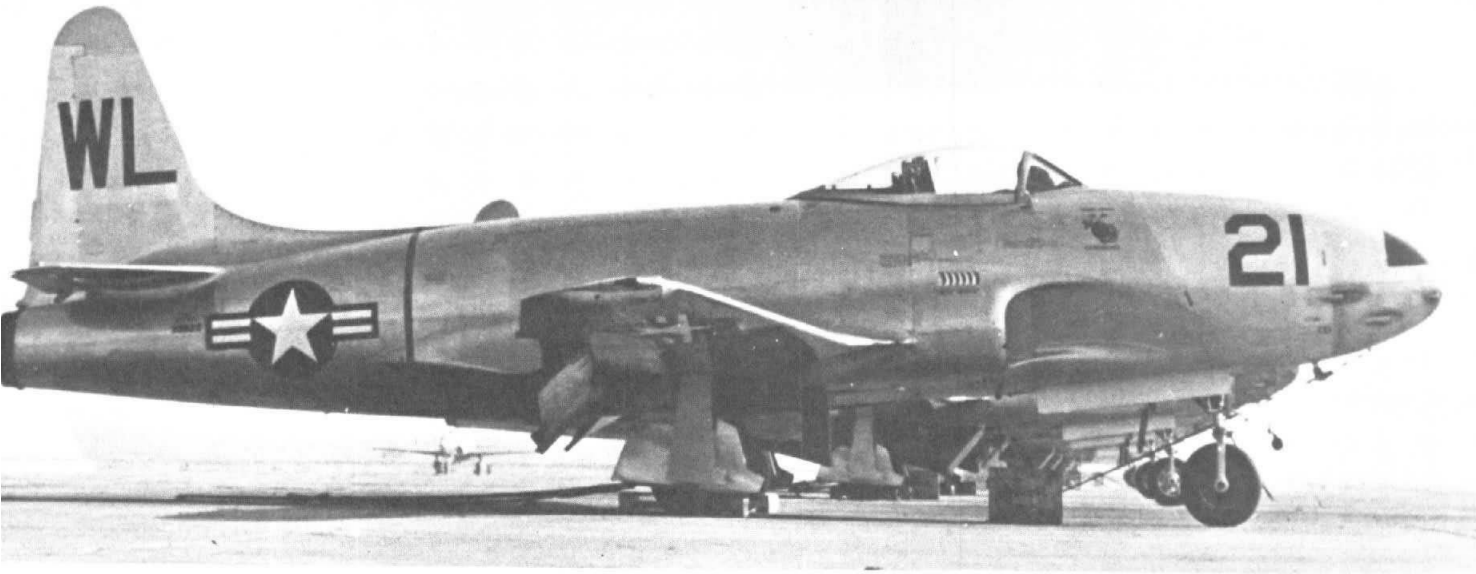
*This gunsight automatically computed the aiming point for moving targets.



USMC Photo A700414

A Lockheed TO-1 Shooting Star, the first jet aircraft to be assigned to the Marine Corps. VMF-311 was the second Marine Corps squadron to receive the TO-1s.

In a 1970 interview with Major General Condon, the following comments were made regarding the operation and maintenance of the TO-1:

> We relied very heavily on the most welcome support of the F-80 outfit at March Air Force Base which was just over the hill from El Toro.
>
> We had some Corsairs left in the squadron and we kept one of them circling up above the saddleback. If we needed parts that we didn't have, we had an arrangement where we'd call the Corsair and he'd call March, give the part number and say, "I'm coming in." By the time he landed—he wouldn't even cut the engine—they'd have the part there to him and he'd have it back over to us in about 10 minutes. In that way we were able to keep the few F-80s we had in commission almost all the time. . . . We also worked all night to do our routine checks or repairs so we could fly every day.

When asked what the pilots thought of this new aircraft, General Condon replied: "They were so thrilled to be in a propellerless aircraft—they just thought it was the greatest thing going. It was like a change from a bow to a rifle—one of the best aircraft this country has ever built." The squadron not only trained its own pilots, but also trained Marine pilots from other west coast units. In recalling this period as an instructor, General Condon stated:

> It was a single place aircraft, so when you turned a new pilot loose in it you wanted to be sure. We only had 15 of them and we wanted to be damn sure that he knew the difference between what he had flown and this particular machine, because it really was quite different. If you tried to stretch a glide into a field and then overcome that by advancing the throttle, you'd wind up in the boondocks because it wouldn't take power as fast as a Corsair—and any delayed action could be pretty crucial.
>
> We had very detailed instructions, so that our student pilots would know exactly what to expect. We would go over and over these instructions. It was sort of a mechanical thing, but it was the only way we could run the program with such a limited number of machines.
>
> That was just for the first three or four flights because once these experienced pilots who were our "students" had half a dozen hours under their belt, their own innate ability took over, and they were tremendous. The syllabus varied depending on how much operating money we had, but they were generally short—15-25 hours per pilot. We also trained jet mechanics in VMF-311. I think that helped really spread the knowledge of jet aircraft operations right down through the support categories as well as the pilot echelon; and that's very essential.[17]

On 27 July, Lieutenant Colonel Condon turned the leadership of VMF-311 over to Lieutenant Colonel Paul J. Fontana,* later Major General Fontana, and within 2 months he was leading flights of TO-1s over NAS El Centro, California, for gunnery evaluation at 15,000 and 35,000 feet.[18]

The 1st of October 1949 brought to a close VMF-311's role as an independent, jet training squadron. The unit was reassigned again to MAG-12 as an operational tactical squadron.[20] By February 1950, the reason for the reassignment of the squadron as a tactical unit became apparent, the new Grumman F9F Panther, a first-line jet fighter, was forthcoming

*As a major in World War II, Fontana distinguished himself by downing five enemy aircraft in 4 days over Guadalcanal and was awarded the Navy Cross and earned the designation of Marine Corps Ace. Later in his career, he served as the commanding officer of MAG-33 in Korea. In 1965, as the commanding general of the 1st MAW, Major General Fontana brought Marine fixed-winged aviation to Vietnam.[19]

USMC Photo A332599

A restored F9F-2 Panther jet on display at the Marine Corps Aviation Museum, located at Quantico, Virginia. The tail still shows VMF-311 markings (WL).

to replace the squadron's Shooting Stars.[21] The TO-1 had served the squadron well. Over 300 pilots were trained with only one minor accident, which occurred when a pilot landed short of the runway following an engine failure.[22]

The F9F-2, first flown in November 1948, had a Pratt and Whitney J-42 engine which produced 5,570 pounds of thrust, 1,150 pounds more than the TO-1 engine. The Panther was armed with four 20mm nose-mounted cannon and could carry external ordnance in the form of 5-inch rockets, 500-pound bombs, and napalm pods. With a speed of 600 miles per hour and a service ceiling of over 50,000 feet, this single-placed fighter was capable of functioning both as a carrier and land-based aircraft.[23]

On 22 March the first F9F-2B was delivered from the factory at Bethpage, Long Island, to NAS San Diego. Lieutenant Colonel Fontana then flew the aircraft to its new home in El Toro.[24]

During these years, the squadron acquired the letters "WL" as its tail designator. It was an event of some significance in squadron history. In the Korean War era, these letters were spoken phonetically as "William Love" from which came a new squadron nickname of "Willy Lovers." Historical records do not indicate the full array of misperceptions believed to have been inspired by this name. The evidence suggests, however, that this nickname, led to the adoption of the heart as part of the squadron insignia.

On 25 July 1950, just 5 years after World War II ended, the United States again was involved in a war and the Marines of VMF-311 realized it would not be long before they would find themselves in Korea. In the months that followed the squadron was alerted for deployment several times, but each time the order was canceled prior to the movement date.

November found VMF-311 involved with training in close air support at Camp Pendleton, rocket firing, night flying, and instrument procedures. The routine was interrupted on 7 November by a Chief of Naval operations dispatch authorizing deployment of the squadron to the Western Pacific on 14 November. Operational flying was immediately halted and preparations for deployment were begun. The men of the squadron worked nights crating and staging material and performing the necessary aircraft maintenance. Since the aircraft were to be shipped on the flight deck of a carrier, extensive measures had to be taken to protect the jets against the destructive salt air. The Fleet Air Service Squadron (FASRON), located at NAS San Diego, prepared 19 planes for the exposed trip. The remaining five aircraft were preserved by the Overhaul and Repair Facility (O&R) also at San Diego. The squadron preserved all the aircraft guns by applying a heavy coat of grease over each weapon.

On 14 November the 55 officers, 247 enlisted men, and 24 F9F-2B aircraft of VMF-311, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Neil R. MacIntyre, departed San Diego on board the carrier USS *Bairoko* (CVE 115). The first day at sea, the seals blew off the aircraft engine air-intake ducts, and the engine doors

USMC Photo A130467

Marine Panther jets from VMF-311 at Yonp'o Airfield, Korea. VMF-311 was the first land-based Marine jet unit in Korea.

blew off and had to be replaced under the most adverse conditions. It was quickly learned that the preservation performed by FASRON was most inadequate. By the time the ship was off Japan, the leading edges of the wings had oxidized and had become pitted, especially on those aircraft stored forward on the deck where they were more exposed to the salt spray. The five aircraft prepared by O&R made the crossing without damage and the guns escaped with only slight traces of rust in some bores.[26]

On 30 November 1950, Marine Fighter Squadron 311 was again at Yokosuka, Japan, and was ready to resume its role in combat.

The Korean Era: 1950-1955

On 30 November 1950, VMF-311 began unloading its aircraft from the USS *Bairoko*. Depreservation was accomplished at Kizarazu AFB, then the aircraft were ferried to the 1st MAW Headquarters at Itami AFB. In addition to the ferrying of squadron aircraft, VMF-311 pilots were used to ferry F4U-4s from Kizarazu to Itami. During one of these flights, Captain John Strickland, Jr., was killed when the Corsair he was flying developed engine trouble and crashed 7 miles outside of Itami. On the same flight, Captain Richard A. Flanagan was forced to bail out over Kobe Bay when his plane also had an engine failure. It was later determined that both accidents were caused by a malfunction of the engine fuel metering system.

After this ill-fated beginning, the unit was ready to head for Korea. On 7 December the forward echelon, consisting of 2 officers and 48 enlisted men, departed Japan for Yonp'o (K-27) Airfield in North Korea approximately 160 miles northeast of Seoul. They were followed 3 days later by the remainder of the squadron, including the pilots with the squadron's aircraft. VMF-311 had become the first land-based Marine air jet unit in Korea.

At 1640, 10 December 1950, VMF-311, now assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW, flew its first combat strike. The first mission, a two-plane section led by Lieutenant Colonel MacIntyre with Major William E. Crowe flying his wing, provided close air support for Eighth Army units approximately 10 miles southwest of the Chosin Resevoir. Although the bomb damage was only one truck and one bulldozer damaged, this mission marked the first time Marine Corps jet aircraft had been used in combat.

Colonel MacIntyre, now retired, in recalling this first mission from Yonp'o writes:

> Earl Crowe and I finally got airborne on 10 December 1950. What a relief. At least we were in our element. . . . We finally found target and started to work. As I recall, on one run I had reached my pullout and was watching Earl's run when I noticed something strange. His tracers weren't quite right. I called, Earl, did you fire on that last run? Pretty soon Earl comes back, no. The light dawns—the tracers were going the wrong way. Earl, I guess someone's shooting at us then—that's the way it goes.[1]

After a few days in Yonp'o, VMF-311 was reassigned to the U. S. Air Force field (K-9) seven miles northeast of Pusan. The Fifth Air Force (FAF) made space for the Marines and assumed operational control of the squadron on 15 December. All land-based 1st MAW pilots and planes came under the direct control of FAF while Marine ground units were under the command of the Eighth U. S. Army in Korea (EUSAK). The FAF-EUSAK Joint Operations Center (JOC) coordinated and controlled all Allied air operations in Korea. Marine fighter and attack squadrons were employed by FAF to:

—Maintain air superiority.

—Furnish close air support for infantry forces threatened by enemy penetration.

—Conduct day and night reconnaissance.

—Conduct interdiction and general support sorties outside the bombline* to harass and destroy Communist forces and other military targets which had an immediate effect upon the current tactical situation.[2]

Colonel MacIntyre describes the field at Pusan (K-9) and the conduct of missions flown in the following way:

> The strip at K-9 was laid out in an old river bed with Marston matting for a surface. The Air Force tried to keep the river bed (compacted dust) firm with asphalt sprays etc. but nothing could really hold it down for any length of time. We had to make our takeoffs in two plane sections. The dust cloud raised by our tail pipes was so thick that after one takeoff we had to wait several minutes before the next takeoff could be attempted. Even the Air Force P-51s were having their problems from this dust cloud situation. So we became experts in section takeoffs and four plane division joinups en route. We continued to operate under these conditions until the dust took its toll. We knew we were having troubles; the cockpit warning lights told us that. After a while it seemed like the cockpits were more like Christmas tree decorations. The immediately problem was fuel pump breakdown along with fuel control malfunctions. The bird had a dual pump system which provided for a backup pump in the event one of them broke down, which provided a margin of safety. But who wants to take off with that situation already in existence. A warning light doesn't lend itself to peace of mind especially in the middle of a mission over enemy territory.
>
> Under the Fifth Air Force we had our missions assigned on a daily op order. For example, it may be an armed recon mission near Wonsan on the East Coast. That's where we would start, however, as frequently happened we would get diverted to a CAS mission over on the West Coast. To be prepared for such possibilities, each of us had quite a library of maps all carefully indexed with a master chart on top for the immediately problem of getting into the general operating area. Once in the general area, all one had to do was select the map for the target by grid coordinate, identify it, make a descent through the nearest cloud hole, fold the map back up, and reinsert it in its proper nitch under your leg, check the fuel state, monitor the warning lights, smile at your wingmen and go to work either on your own or under a forward controller either airborne or on the ground.

By the end of December, the pilots had rocketed and strafed barracks and storage buildings northwest of Yonp'o; attacked rail bridges, tunnels, and rail cars from Yonp'o west to Pyongyang; and flown reconnaissance and CAS in support of the U. S. 25th Infantry Division and the Army of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the area north of Seoul. The CAS missions were often controlled in the target area by Air Force special airborne coordinators who controlled the flights from small observation aircraft known as "Mosquitoes."

A most unusual event was recorded on 21 December when, on a reconnaissance mission, First Lieutenant Weldon R. Mitchell sighted an enemy supply caravan which included some animals used to pack supplies. When rolling in on target, Lieutenant Mitchell, expecting to see a shaggy Mongolian horse appear in his gunsight, was astonished when he identified his target as a two-humped camel. He hit the target with his guns and, as he suspected, the caravan contained ammunition and the camel was all but vaporized in the ensuing explosion. Naturally when the pilot reported he had sighted and destroyed an enemy camel caravan, the squadron became the object of many Air Force jokes. However, it was not long before the Air Force also spotted other camels and apologies were in order.[3]

The day after Christmas the squadron suffered its first Korean War casuality. While leading a two-plane armed reconnaissance flight, Captain Jerry E. A. Miller attacked a highway bridge and as he was pulling out, his Panther hit the top of a hill and exploded.[4] During the short period in December that the squadron operated in Korea, the unit accumulated a total of 424 hours of combat flying.

The squadron continued close air support for Eighth Army units into January 1951, as the winter cold, mud, and rain added to the squadron's difficulties. Colonel MacIntyre explained some of the difficulties:

> Hot tailpipe runups not only melted and blew away snow but also melted the frozen ground and created monstrous ruts in the ground making taxiing and parking extremely difficult. That beautiful snow covered cowpasture became a nightmare and a big mud hole.

These factors greatly affected the operation of the F9F which had not been previously tested under combat conditions.

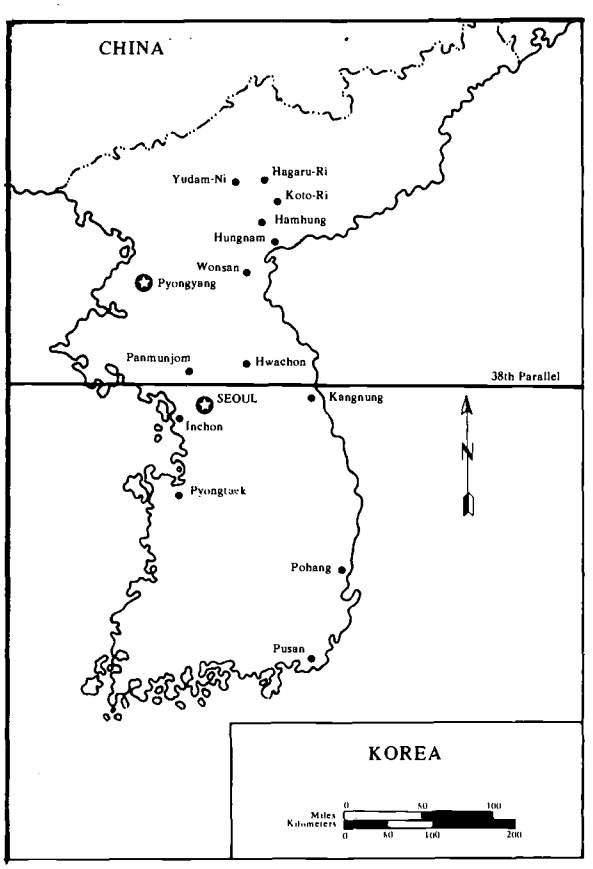
During this period the squadron joined other 1st MAW units for a series of interdiction raids against the Communist supply net located in the Korean waist between the 38th and 39th parallels to disrupt the Communist Chinese Forces' transport truck system.[5]

By mid-January, mechanical difficulties progressively curtailed tactical operations to a point below normal combat requirements. In response to the squadron's request for technical assistance, Pratt and Whitney and Grumman sent representatives to

*Bombline — an imaginary line prescribed by the troop commander and coordinated with the air force commander, forward of which air forces are free to attack targets without danger to or coordination with the ground units.

Pusan and on 16 January all 311's jets were grounded. Because of the crowded conditions at Pusan and the extensive maintenance required, on 25 January the squadron was ordered back to Itami AFB in Japan until the aircraft could be overhauled. Unfortunately, the grounding came too late to save Captain Richard A. Flanagan. He was killed on 8 January when his jet lost power and crashed off the end of the Pusan airstrip.[7]

On 5 February, although still in Japan, VMF-311 was reassigned to MAG-33 which was located at Yongil-man Airfield (K-3) in Pohang, Korea. Two days later the squadron's equipment accompanied by 6 officers and 27 enlisted men, sailed by LST for Korea. By 17 February the planes were finally ready and 22 Panthers took off for K-3 while the remainder of the personnel departed Japan on air transports. Two days later the squadron was back in action and throughout the remainder of the month flew CAS and armed reconnaissance missions resulting in the destruction of 39 buildings, 4 warehouses, and 1 railroad car, while killing an estimated 16 enemy troops as the pilots hit the area north of Seoul along the 38th parallel.



In March, MAG-33 consisted of VMF-311 and VMF-212 while MAG-12, at Bradshaw Airfield (K-1) near Pusan, was composed of VMF-214, -312, and -323, and VMF (N)-513.

On 11 March, Lieutenant Colonel John F. Kinney became the new commanding officer of VMF-311. The final recollection by Colonel MacIntyre was not of the combat missions flown, but of the men of the squadron. Of them he wrote: "They were the greatest bunch of men I have ever known. They took their losses, their heartbreaks, adversity and setbacks and all they asked was a chance to do their jobs. They were real pros."[8]

As had happened in the past, the change of command was closely followed by the loss of a pilot. On 18 March, Captain Robert D. Hayes failed to return from a close air support mission and was declared missing in action. Four days later the wreckage of his aircraft was found and his status was changed to killed in action.

Major General Paul J. Fontana, in recalling this period, writes:

> When the squadron returned to Korea in 1951, I was the commanding officer of MAG-33 at K-3 (Pohang). By this time VMF-311 had remedied the fuel control difficulties. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Kinney, the squadron compiled an impressive combat sortie rate. John Kinney applied his ingenious mechanical ability, which had maintained the F4F Wildcats' flying on Wake Island almost 10 years previously, to make this squadron an effective operational unit. The squadron's performance from then on was outstanding.[9]

During April, the squadron on two separate occasions was scrambled to provide air support for units in contact with strong enemy forces and each time the speedy jets arrived on station in time to influence the outcome of the engagement. As a result of these two scrambles, the squadron's operational flight procedures were changed for experimental purposes. The practice of sending out flights of scheduled armed reconnaissance or close air support was terminated and a scramble alert system was placed in effect. Under this program four aircraft were maintained on a 10-minute standby. The pilots were required to remain in the cockpit ready for immediate takeoff on call from the tactical air control center (TACC). VMF-311, with its 24 aircraft, was the only unit in Korea to operate on this basis. Nearly 500 other aircraft continued to fly on a regularly scheduled basis. The squadron also maintained two aircraft on CAP alert with pilots in the cockpit. This scramble procedure, however, proved less effective than the FAF schedule system and, with the ex-

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ception of the CAP mission, these standbys were discontinued.

Under the FAF system, fighter-bomber aircraft in Korea were scheduled at regular intervals for close air support, special targets, or armed reconnaissance. Four aircraft reported in to the TACC at intervals of approximately 5 minutes on prescheduled missions. As these aircraft were already airborne, they could arrive over the target within 10 to 15 minutes. Those planes which proceeded on a prebriefed mission were given secondary targets and each flight was available for contact by any airborne tactical air controller for other target assignments. This system proved to be highly effective. Each squadron was given its daily commitments and, therefore, could schedule its maintenance around these requirements. VMF-311 found that with this system it could sustain, with no difficulty, a schedule of four aircraft during every daylight hour with the squadron flying as many as 42 sorties in addition to maintaining two aircraft on CAP. Considering the shortage of spare parts which existed during April, this was no simple accomplishment.[10]

The lack of enemy opposition and the good weather in April unfortunately did not carry over into May. There was, instead, an average of $1^1/_2$ days of bad weather per week, and the pilots encountered intensive AA fire throughout the month resulting in 12 planes damaged and 1 destroyed. One pilot, Captain Mercer R. Smith, was captured when his jet was hit and he was forced to bail out over enemy territory on 1 May. Captain Smith remained a prisoner of war until 5 September 1953.[11]

On 9 May 1951, 75 1st MAW Corsairs and Panther jets were part of a 300-plane raid staged by the FAF against Communist airfields at Sinuiju, on the Korean side of the Yalu River. VMA-311's contribution to this largest raid to date was 20 aircraft. The squadron pilots were among the first to arrive on station and immediately began striking at the targets on the enemy airfields. After 18 minutes, fuel consumption required that the VMA-311 flight return to base. While over the target, several MIG-15s were sighted on the Manchurian side of the Yalu River, but they did not attempt to engage the U. S. armada, nor were the U. S. planes cleared to cross the Yalu. The only squadron incident which occurred during the mission was when one Panther flamed out while on station, but a normal air start was accomplished at 26,000 feet and the jet rejoined the flight and returned safely.

USMC Photo A347877

A Marine Panther jet has just released three napalm bombs on a run against Communists forces in Korea. The napalm bombs can be seen at the bottom of the picture.

Operation Strangle, a FAF all-out interdiction effort to cripple the enemy supply line, was undertaken on 20 May. This operation against vital road and rail networks severely restricted the flow of supplies to the enemy units advancing south.

When the Chinese Communist spring offensive began, MAG-12 Corsairs and MAG-33 Panther jets delivered maximum support to the 1st and 7th Marines as well as keeping the pressure on the enemy through Operation Strangle.[12]

June found VMF-311 supporting elements of the 1st Marine Division south of the "Punch Bowl" where the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 5th Marines were preparing to assault Hill 729. As the fog lifted on 6 June, close air support was delivered with such deadly effectiveness that the assault battalions were able to take the first ridge by nightfall. For the next 9 days the 5th Marines fought to secure the objective

while the F9Fs continued to pound the enemy until Hill 729 was firmly in Marine hands.[13]

Antiaircraft fire continued to plague the squadron throughout the month. On 18 June, Captain Jack E. Perry was hit and forced to bail out of his crippled Panther over enemy territory. His wingman saw him run for cover, but, by the time a rescue helicopter arrived on the scene, Captain Perry could not be located and the helicopter was forced to abandon the search when it began taking intense small arms fire. Captain Perry was later confirmed as a POW and was held in captivity until 1 September 1953.[14]

The effect of Operation Strangle on the enemy must be left largely to conjecture. There can be no doubt that it added enormously to the Communists' logistical problems. It is equally certain that they solved these problems to such an extent that their combat units were never at a decisive handicap for lack of ammunition and other supplies. Operation Strangle, in short, merely added to the evidence that interdictory air was not enough to knock a determined adversary out of the war.[15]

New tactical developments pioneered by the 1st MAW during the Korean War advanced the United Nations Command (UNC) air effort and added to the 1st MAW reputation for versatility. In order to achieve Marine aviation's primary goal of providing 24-hour close air support, regardless of weather conditions, the new MPQ-14 radar-controlled bombing equipment, developed between 1946 and 1950, was employed by a Marine Air Support Radar Team (MASRT) to control Marine attack sorties. By means of height finding and directional radars, a pilot was able to take off, fly to the target, drop his ordnance, and return to base without ever having seen the ground.[16]

During June the squadron flew an astounding total of 2,241 flight hours of which only 107 were non-combat flights. Throughout the month the pilots flew numerous close air support and interdictory missions in an area 75 miles north of Seoul, ranging eastward to the Sea of Japan. However, the accumulation of this flight time did not come without cost. In addition to the loss of Captain Perry's aircraft, another F9F was severely damaged when an engine failure necessitated a wheels-up landing, and 11 others received damage from enemy fire.

As operations in 1951 continued, the true value of the jet fighter was recognized. The superior speed of the jets became a significant element of effective air support. Time after time the Panthers were on target delivering ordnance before the Corsairs arrived in the area. The jets were also a more stable firing platform offering better gunnery, bombing, and rocket accuracy.[17] Additionally the jet was less vulnerable to enemy ground fire due to its speed and was more capable of protecting itself from enemy fighters than were the prop aircraft. Because of the greater visibility in the jet, it was easier for pilots to pick out targets. The jet could be rearmed and turned around for another flight in less time than the prop aircraft, and maintenance on the jet was deemed easier, particularly engine replacements which could be accomplished on the F9F in 2 hours.[18]

The squadron continued its high tempo of operations on into July as it provided support to Eighth Army units with armed reconnaissance, CAS, and bomber escort missions. A practice of maintaining 300 knots speed and 1,000 feet minimum altitude was adopted in the entire reconnaissance area because of the increase in enemy antiaircraft fire.

To counter this fire, fast, hard-hitting attacks were made on antiaircraft positions. A VMF-311 flight consisting of 16 jets made one such attack on positions in a heavily defended town during which the pilots dropped all their bombs during a single run. So successful was the use of surprise and speed that several gun positions were destroyed before any accurate antiaircraft fire could be delivered.

Again in July the squadron was heavily tasked, but the poor flying weather both at home base and in the target area restricted flight operations. During the month the unit lost another F9F-2B and its pilot. First Lieutenant Robert W. Bell was part of a division of 3 aircraft on 21 July when they were jumped by a flight of 15 MIG-15s while the division was returning from a combat patrol. Lieutenant Bell was last seen on the wing of the leader as the Panthers made a run for cloud cover. Communications with escaped American POWs at a later time revealed that Lieutenant Bell was a POW in North Korea and remained as such until his release on 23 September 1953.[19]

During this encounter, the MIG pilots exhibited a high degree of airmanship, but showed little enthusiasm for pressing an attack on an equal basis. They seemed to prefer, instead, to use their advantage in speed and rate of climb to pick their own time for engagement and to break away when conditions became unfavorable. In actual fact the F9F was no match for the MIG in overall performance.

USMC Photo A130478

Marine Panther jets from VMF-311 being refueled at Pohang (K-3) Airfield in Korea. The aircraft are already rearmed for their next mission against the Communists.

The best defense was to use the smaller turning radius of the F9F to maneuver into a position where the MIGs could not fire on the Panthers.[20]

In August inclement weather continued to restrict flight operations, although the squadron did manage to accumulate 1,363 flight hours. Maintenance problems experienced during the month were routine with the exception of three incidents of 20mm high explosive rounds exploding in the mouth of the feed mechanism causing major damage to two aircraft and minor damage to a third. A change in the feeder alinement was made and the malfunctions were eliminated.[21]

On the majority of missions flown during this period, no antiaircraft fire was received, but when it was encountered it was heavy and accurate. During a 10-plane armed reconnaissance mission on 6 August, one aircraft was hit and the pilot was forced to ditch his plane. A helicopter picked up the uninjured pilot and returned him to Pohang. Four days later, while leading an attack on a supply area and a vehicle convoy, Major Frank S. Hoffecker's aircraft took a hit while on a napalm run, burst into flames and exploded as it hit the ground. No one in the flight saw the pilot eject; Major Hoffecker was listed as killed in action.

On 26 August 1951, the squadron received a letter of commendation from Major General Claude B. Ferenbaugh, USA, the Commanding General, U. S. Army 7th Infantry Division for missions flown in support of elements of the division on 16 August. The 7th Division was in the vicinity of Hills 851 and 820 when it began receiving heavy fire and encountering the enemy in several positions along the front. A call for close air support was answered by four F9Fs piloted by Captain Johnny D. Lindley, Captain Mont L. Beamon, Second Lieutenant "L" "G" Linman, and Technical Sergeant Lyle A. Watts. They napalmed, strafed, and rocketed fortified positions with such "deadly accuracy" that the Army division was able to counter the enemy thrust. The commanding general also congratulated the squadron skipper on the "splendid cooperation and the fighting efficiency of these pilots."[22]

The only noteworthy incident in September occurred on the 25th when a flight of eight Panthers, on a rail-cutting mission 35 miles north of Pyongyang on the west coast of North Korea, were jumped by 8 to 12 MIG-15s. The F9Fs jettisoned their bombs and turned towards the MIGs. The Panther pilots managed to get off a few extreme range bursts, but no hits were apparent. After a few passes, the enemy aircraft pulled away and broke contact with no hits taken by either side.

Throughout October and November the Panther jets hammered away at vital rail points and supply convoys on the highways of North Korea. The heaviest concentration of missions were on the road and rail networks just north of Pyongyang extending east to the Sea of Japan on a line about 20 miles north of the 39th parallel.

On several occasions, MIGs made passes on the Panther flights, with as many as 32 enemy aircraft being observed in one formation, but the enemy kept their distance and avoided decisive air-to-air engagements.

One pilot, Second Lieutenant Edward L. Frakes, was lost on 3 October when his aircraft was shot down over enemy territory 35 miles north of Pyongyang. A flight of three F9Fs again was attacking rail targets when Lieutenant Frakes radioed that he was hit and was bailing out. The other planes in the flight spotted the crippled jet diving toward the ground, and watched the plane hit the ground and explode. Since no one saw the pilot eject, he was reported as killed in action.[23]

With the cold weather of the Korean winter approaching, all squadron members drew protective clothing and prepared themselves for the months ahead. The weather became unfavorable as rain and reduced visibility hampered the operations but did not reduce the requirements levied on the squadron.

As the year came to a close, enemy antiaircraft fire downed another F9F. On 18 December, First Lieutenant Charles A. Sewell was flying in an eight-plane formation on a rail cutting mission in the area north of Pyongyang which had become all too familiar to the squadron pilots. When his aircraft was hit, Lieutenant Sewell managed to keep the jet flying long enough to get out to sea where he ejected after giving a position report. After a brief but cold ride in his raft, the pilot was picked up about 3 miles at sea by a helicopter which brought him to a destroyer in the area. After 5 days as a guest of the Navy, Lieutenant Sewell was back at Pohang ready to resume flying.

During the 845 flights flown in December, the squadron expended 62,179 rounds of 20mm, 167 general purpose (GP) 500-pound bombs, 1,860 250-pound GP bombs, 16 260-pound fragmentation bombs, and 90 5-inch rockets while attaining a total of 1,353 flight hours.

The new year brought little change for VMF-311 as it continued to support Eighth Army operations. Unfortunately, the loss of pilots also continued. On 3 January 1952, Major George N. Major was flying in a three-plane division on an armed reconnaissance mission along Highway 41 approximately 50 miles north of Seoul. When all the jets began receiving automatic weapons fire at 2,000 feet, Major called the flight leader reporting that he had been hit and, although he did not think it was serious, he said he was returning to base. The other aircraft turned to join on his wing when the flight leader saw the damaged jet suddenly noseover and dive straight into the ground about 10 miles from where it had been hit. A search was conducted of the crash area, but there was no sign of the pilot or any indication that he survived the crash.[24]

Combat operations during February were directed primarily against the enemy railroad system and the jets made 161 rail cuts as the squadron continued its participation in Operation Strangle. Although antiaircraft fire was encountered on 65 percent of the missions, only three aircraft received hits and none were lost. The toughest enemy during this period was not the Communists but the bitter cold.

MAG-33, which had been operating with just two aircraft squadrons, suddenly doubled in size as VMF-115, also equipped with the F9F, arrived in February, and in March the newly formed Marine Photographic Squadron 1 (VMJ-1) was assigned to the group. As these new squadrons were undergoing their initial familiarization flights in Korea, Captain Frank J. Hubka flew VMF-311's 10,000th sortie on 28 March 1952.[25]

Unfortunately, this milestone was preceded by the loss of another pilot when, on 4 March, Captain Roy C. Gray, Jr., was shot down and captured. Captain Gray was leading a flight on a rail-cutting mission about 40 miles south of Pyongyang and as he was pulling out of a run he was hit by intensive ground fire. Because of the damage to the aircraft and the low altitude at which he was hit, the pilot was forced to put the aircraft down in enemy territory and was captured immediately. Captain Gray remained a POW until released on 5 September 1953.[26]

April was devoted to combat operations, on-the-job training of new personnel, and familiarization instruction for newly arrived pilots. All the jets were beginning to show signs of corrosion, and all F9F were grounded for one day for inspection and replacement of corroded cannon-plugs. While the planes were grounded, the squadron Marines used this opportunity to survey their assigned sector of the airfield defense perimeter and to review the unit's ground defense procedures.

Combat operations continued without any significant change until the last day of April 1952 when the elusive MIG-15s again came on the scene. At 1130, a flight of seven Panthers took off on a prebriefed mission to strike a supply route 35 miles directly north of Pyongyang. The aircraft approached the target at 25,000 feet without incident and as the

formation was about to begin a high speed run on the target, they were jumped by eight MIGs. The Panther flight, led by Major Louis H. Steman, continued its run on the target. The MIGs jettisoned their external fuel tanks and followed the Marines down, firing at the last aircraft piloted by Captain John E. McVey. After pulling out from the run and holding approximately 450 knots, the F9F turned into the MIGs. After a brief exchange of fire, the MIGs holding true to form, broke off the engagement. Before the enemy departed, Captain Walter E. Daniel managed to put a few hits into the nose section of one of the MIGs, but the score ended in a tie as one of the F9Fs also was hit in the tail section. The flight then returned home without further incident.

If there was such a thing as a "routine day" in a combat environment, it can probably best be described by the following extract taken from the VMF-311 Historical Diary of April 1952.

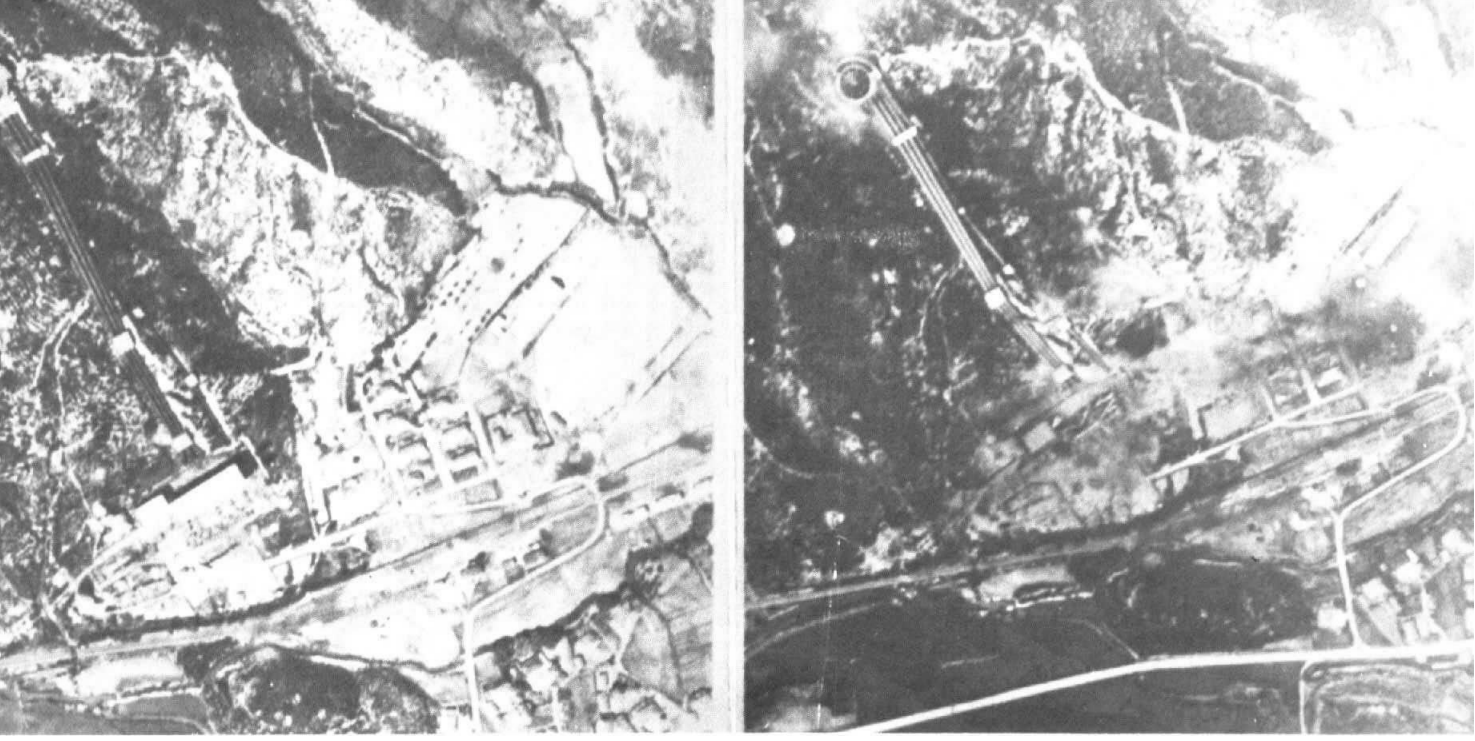
> Example of a Routine Day
>
> Due to the operations [in which] the squadron is now engaged, the following schedule is to serve as an example only. This routine is variable to meet existing weather and operational conditions:
>
> 0500—Combat Air Patrol aircraft are manned.
>
> 0600—Reveille for normal working day.
>
> 0630—Breakfast.
>
> 0730—Muster of all personnel in respective working areas.
>
> 1100—Personnel not engaged in immediate work on aircraft relieved for dinner.
>
> 1130—Dinner.
>
> 1230—Personnel are mustered in the working areas.
>
> 1630—Personnel not engaged in immediate work on aircraft relieved for supper.
>
> 1700—Supper.
>
> 1800—Personnel needed for loading, gassing, or maintenance of aircraft not in commission or not combat ready, return to work until such time as the work is completed.
>
> 1945—Combat Air Patrol aircraft are secured.
>
> CAP aircraft are on alert scramble from one-half hour before until one-half hour after sunset. Pilots, working two hour shifts, remain in the cockpit of the aircraft ready for immediate takeoff until scrambled or relieved.
>
> (1) Pilots of the squadron report for briefing approximately one hour prior to takeoff.
>
> (2) Plane captains, ordnance and line personnel are at their respective jobs prior to one hour before takeoff and remain there until their jobs are secured in the evening.
>
> (3) Engineering personnel average 3 to 4 days a week of night work from 1730 to 2230 placing aircraft in commission.
>
> (4) One operations clerk reports for duty at 0415, prior to the first CAP and first briefing.
>
> (5) One intelligence clerk reports for duty at 0415 to annotate the Flak Situation Map for the immediate target that is to be hit that day.[27]

One item which was not addressed in this schedule was that of normal flight operations which were conducted throughout the day from sunrise to sunset.

The warm weather of May was a welcome relief to the officers and men who had just endured the severe Korean winter. However, spring weather was the only good thing about May for VMF-311. On 10 May, four Panthers led by Captain William Regas were directed to attack enemy supply dumps and artillery pieces about 40 miles south of the 39th parallel, north of Seoul. On the second pass at the target, Captain John S. Bostwick delivered his ordnance, made a left climbing pullout, rolled over on his back, and dove straight into the ground 150 meters behind enemy lines. Although the other members of the flight did not observe any ground fire while they were over the target area, they did come under intense machinegun fire as they circled over the wreckage of the F9F. The cause of the crash remained undetermined, but enemy ground fire was listed as a possible factor.

The following day, a four-plane division was on a close air support mission, just 15 miles east of where Captain Bostwick went down, when misfortune once again claimed a squadron pilot. The planes were orbiting at 6,000 feet, waiting for the airborne controller to mark the target with rockets, when Captain Malcom C. Hagan flew into a small cloud. Just as he emerged from the cloud, he collided with a small observation plane, causing the right wing of the jet to be torn from the fuselage. The aircraft then went into a violent, nosedown roll and exploded as it struck the ground. The pilot of the observation plane was also killed as the initial collision completely destroyed the small craft before he could bail out.[28]

Two days later, seven aircraft were on a rail-cutting mission approximately 25 miles north of Pyongyang, when First Lieutenant Milton H. Baugh transmitted a "Mayday," stating his plane had been hit and he had lost power. The pilot, rather than bailing out, elected to make a forced landing on the salt flats just to the west along the coast. Lieutenant Baugh landed the aircraft with what appeared to be little damage to the jet, but by the time the flight arrived over the downed plane, the canopy was observed open and there was no sign of the pilot. Lieutenant Baugh was later reported as captured and remained a POW until 30 August 1953.[29]



USMC Photo A332600

F9Fs from VMF-311 and VMF-115 destroyed the hydroelectric plant at Chosin Reservoir on 24 June 1952 in the first massed strike by the Panther jets. Photographs show the target before and after the strike.

Whoever made the statement, ''We had lots of luck and all of it bad'' must have been with VMF-311 during this period. Five days after the loss of Lieutenant Baugh, the commanding officer of MAG-33, Colonel Martin A. Severson, logged the squadron's fourth mishap of the month. During a takeoff, Colonel Severson, flying a 311 plane, was unable to gain sufficient speed to become airborne. As the jet was running out of runway, Colonel Severson realized he was committed to getting the plane off the deck. Holding the jet on the runway until the last possible moment, he lifted off just long enough to raise the gear before the plane settled back on the runway skidding about 300 yards beyond the overrun, causing serious back injuries to Colonel Severson and major damage to the Panther.[30]

On 3 June 1952, Major Henry W. Hise, who later retired as a brigadier general, assumed command of the squadron. In recalling that period, General Hise writes:

> We frequently flew as many as 20 aircraft stacked down in formation through several thousand feet of clouds and sometimes all the way to the target. On arriving at the initial point in the clouds, the let-down would be started and if we did not break out, the flight would climb and drop all ordnance under the guidance of radar. The normal altitude of approach was 25,000 feet with a ground speed of 270 knots [then we would make a] high speed approach to 14,000 feet. [We would then begin] a dive at a 45 degree angle to 3,000 feet, drop the bombs, and pull out in level flight by 1,000 feet.

General Hise also described what he considers to have been ''hairiest flight that we flew during the period'':

> On 15 June 1952, we flew a flak suppression mission on the airfields east of Pyongyang. . . .We were carrying VT [variable timed] fused bombs for the first time in Korea. VMF-311 was the lead element of the flight and VMF-115 had the last 12 to 16 aircraft. Each of us was armed with four bombs. You could look out at the wing and see each bomb's nose and fuse. We had the flight joined and were just passing through about 8,000 feet when I heard someone in the VMF-115 sections state that [Captain Howard D. Campbell] had just blown up. His wingman's jet received major damage from the blast and was forced to bail out. After the news sunk in on me that Campbell's VT fuses had malfunctioned and killed him, I had to decide what to do. Since we were the opening squadron of a major attack on Pyongyang, it was very desirable that we go through with the mission. I called the flight and told them that if the prop on their bomb fuses started to spin to jettison immediately. Then I directed the flight to open up so that one plane blowing up would not get his wingman and also suggested that anyone with doubt about his ordnance go out over the ocean, drop, and abort. We then went on to Pyongyang. All of the 311 planes made the trip OK. Some of the 115 pilots who had seen Campbell explode went out to sea and jettisoned. It was about a 45 minute ride to Pyongyang and they were long minutes. We made an approach above broken clouds and encounted some radar directed heavy AAA breaking just below the formation. I broke up the flight and got rid of the bombs on the airfield. It was a great relief. We had one pilot with a hung bomb but he managed to shake it off. We did not lose anyone to AAA and made it home without further incident.

> Investigation revealed that the 311 pilots were not in any danger. Our bombs and fuses had been properly installed. The ordnance crew of 115 had improperly installed the arming wires. The mission was a real exercise in decision making and tension.[31]

The next massing of airpower in which the squadron was involved came on 23-24 June when MAG-33, now under the command of Colonel Condon, put VMF-311 and -115 into the air for a 2-day mission to destroy a power complex at the Chosin Reservoir. On the 23d, 22 aircraft from VMF-311 and 18 from VMF-115 took off from Pohang and arrived over the target at 1559. The attack, which continued until 1612, completely demolished the power station except for one wall left standing. The flight received intense antiaircraft fire, but no planes were hit. The following day 20 jets from 311 and 15 from 115 attacked the complex a second time. In 22 minutes a multistory building, a barracks complex, and a large reinforced concrete building were destroyed. Again enemy fire was encountered, but resulted in only minor damage to one plane. This was the first time F9Fs had ever been massed for a strike of this type. Although the jets carried a smaller payload than the Corsairs and Douglas AD-6 Skyraiders of MAG-12, the extremely precise bombing record made by the Panther jet pilots put to rest the doubts about jet accuracy that had been held by some in the 1st MAW.[32]

From July to September 1952, the squadron enjoyed a period free from combat losses, operational accidents, and MIG encounters. In September, however, a landing accident occurred when the nose gear of a F9F collapsed. Investigation of the accident revealed that this aircraft as well as 16 other squadron planes had cracks in the nose wheel struts. This caused the majority of the aircraft to remain inoperative until repairs could be made. The required repairs hampered the unit's combat effectiveness and monthly combat sorties were limited to 733 for a total of 888 flight hours.

On 19 September, a flight of eight Panthers, attacking a supply area about 45 miles northeast of Seoul, came under intense machinegun fire which hit the aircraft piloted by Captain Edward H. P. Lynk. Fortunately, the pilot was able to get the crippled plane over friendly territory before he ejected. Captain Lynk was quickly picked up by a helicopter which returned him to home base.

On the last day of the month, a flame-out during the landing approach resulted in the death of Second Lieutenant Odyce W. Livingston when his jet crashed 2 miles short of the runway at K-3.

Although misfortune plagued the squadron, Major Alexander J. "Rocky" Gillis, a VMF-311 pilot assigned as an exchange pilot to the Air Force's 335th Fighter Intercepter Squadron, distinguished himself by becoming not only the first naval aviator to destroy three enemy aircraft in Korea, but also the second to score a multiple kill in a single day.[33]* On 15 September, Major Gillis, flying the Air Force's North American F-86 Sabre, downed his first MIG-15. Then on 28 September, while flying in a four-plane formation in the vicinity of the mouth of the Yalu River, Major Gillis brought down two more MIGs before having to eject from his disabled aircraft. After nearly 4 hours in the Yellow Sea, a rescue helicopter picked him up and returned him to safety.[34]

By the fall of 1952, the situation in Korea changed to a type of position warfare that enabled the enemy to increase their radar and antiaircraft installations. To counter this, passive electronics countermeasures (ECM) were instituted by FAF. This program was enhanced in September 1952 by the commissioning of VMC-1 (Marine Composite Squadron 1), administratively assigned to MACG-2 (Marine Air Control Group 2). The squadron possessed the only FAF ECM capability to locate enemy radars and was the primary source of ECM intercept equipment in FAF squadrons for early warning and radar control monitoring.[35]

As VMF-311 ended its second year in Korea, another pilot was lost. On 5 December the squadron launched an 18-plane attack on an enemy supply concentration just 18 miles south of where Captain Lynk had been hit. Each plane was loaded with two 500-pound and six 250-pound bombs. The attack proceeded as briefed, and upon completion of the mission the flight leader called for all aircraft to check in by radio. Captain Donald H. Clark failed to answer the call and did not rendezvous with the rest of the flight. The pilots conducted a search but could not find any evidence of a crash. After being carried as missing in action for a year, Captain Clark's status was changed to killed in action.[36]

The same day, the squadron dropped a record of 47.9 tons of ordnance on enemy positions. By the end

*The first naval aviator to achieve a multiple kill in Korea in a single day was Captain Phillip C. DeLong, a F4U-4 pilot from VMF-312, who shot down two enemy planes on 21 April 1951.

of the month the squadron had exceeded 15,000 combat sorties and accumulated nearly 30,000 combat flight hours since arriving in Korea.

Aside from collecting combat sorties, flight hours, and operational statistics, it seemed that VMF-311 was collecting something else—commanding officers. During 1952, the squadron had the unusual distinction of having seven commanding officers. It seemed that every jet-qualified major and lieutenant colonel in Korea was to be given a turn at commanding 311.[37]

It was during these years that the VMF-311 squadron insignia started appearing on its aircraft. Just as the squadron insignia became a noticeable identification for VMA-311 aircraft, the pilots became readily indentifiable by the scarves they purchased to go along with the squadron insignia. These were a soft baby blue overprinted with pink hearts and the squadron name. Needless to say they became highly prized items particularly in infantry circles during the war. (One of the scarves has survived the ravages of time and can be seen at the Marine Corps Aviation Museum in Quantico, Virginia).

Shortly after the 44 officers and 172 enlisted men of VMF-311 had welcomed in the new year as appropriately as the combat situation would allow, 2 officers and 12 enlisted men left for Oppama, Japan, to perform the acceptance checks* on six new F9F-5 aircraft. The new aircraft, first assigned to the Marine Corps in 1952, had a larger engine that developed an additional 500 pounds of thrust. The F9F-5 appearance changed only slightly in that the fuselage was now 2 feet longer and the tail section was slightly higher.[38]

The new Panther jets were flown to Korea and on 14 January 1953 the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur H. Adams,** led the first Marine F9F-5 combat mission. Flying close air support for the 40th U.S. Army Infantry Division and the 12th ROK Infantry Division, the flight received a bomb damage assessment crediting them with two personnel shelters destroyed, five automatic weapons positions heavily damaged, and one secondary explosion observed. The pilots encountered no enemy opposition and the flight returned safely.

Large flights consisting of F9Fs from VMF-311 and -115 continued with great success as no aerial opposition was encountered and antiaircraft fire against the jets became less accurate. On 16 February, 16 aircraft from VMF-311 joined with 19 planes from VMF-115 for an interdiction strike against an enemy supply buildup along Highway 1 south of Pyongyang in North Korea. The flight met only meager small arms fire, however, one VMF-311 jet was hit and was on fire by the time it landed. The pilot, baseball's famous Captain Theodore "Ted" S. Williams, escaped uninjured although the aircraft was a total loss.

With Captain Williams, who was in the squadron from February to July 1953, the unit also had an officer who was destined to become one of the most famous of Marine aviators, Major John H. Glenn, Jr. Major Glenn joined VMF-311 in February 1953 and in July, after 63 missions with the squadron, was assigned to the Air Force's 25th Fighter Squadron equipped with North American Sabres. That same month, Major Glenn showed the Air Force what a Marine could do as he shot down three MIGs in 9 days and earned his fifth DFC.***

As the end of March 1953 approached, the squadron was busy supporting the 5th Marines which was struggling through rain-swollen rice paddies and up muddy slopes in the fight for Outpost Vegas. With the 5th Marines was the 1st Marine Division reserve, the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, and in support was the artillery of the 11th Marines. On 27 March, VMF-311 alone flew 19 interdiction missions and 26 close air support sorties as the 5th Marines pushed forward. The pilots dropped 55 tons

*Acceptance checks consisting of an inspection of the aircraft, examination of the maintenance logs and the engine log book, as well as a test flight of each new aircraft are completed before a unit receipts for an aircraft.

**During World War II, then Captain Adams served two tours with the 1st MAW in the Northern Solomons area where he earned 3 Distinguished Flying Crosses and 13 Air Medals. In Korea he was awarded his fourth and fifth Distinguished Flying Crosses and three more Air Medals. He was promoted to brigadier general in July 1964 and to major general in November 1967. After serving as Deputy Chief of Staff, Commander in Chief, Atlantic, General Adams retired in Norfolk, Virginia.

***Later as an astronaut, Glenn made the first orbital flight of the earth in February 1962 and became the first recipient of the Alfred A. Cunningham award. (This award is named for the first Marine aviator and presented annually to the outstanding Marine aviator of the year.) He retired from the Marine Corps with the rank of colonel and later was elected U. S. Senator from Ohio.[39]

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of ordnance on enemy positions, topping the previous squadron high of 47.9 tons set on 5 December 1952. Joined by other squadrons, as well as some Air Force jets, the pilots hit target after target destroying bridges, supply dumps, bunkers, mortar emplacements, and trenches and raking troop positions with 20mm fire. After patching those planes which were hit by small arms fire, the pilots were back on the following day, joined by VMF-115 for a continuation of the mission. By nightfall the 5th Marines owned Vegas. The air-ground team had knocked out the *358th CCF Regiment* without any squadron losses ending the month with an air of success.[40]

Along the division front, the war in April was still a daily survival contest despite the promising outlook at Panmunjom. On 10 April, the pilots of VMF-311 were again called for support, this time to thwart a Communist attempt to retake outpost Carson. Two flights of Panthers, totaling 16 F9Fs, quickly discouraged any serious attacks by the Communists and the hill position remained firmly in Marine Corps hands.[41]

For the two MAG-33 fighter squadrons, 17 April was recorded as a "maximum effort day." From 0410 until 2030 that evening, VMF-311 flew continuous missions in support of the 7th Infantry Division which had met stiff resistance while operating on the extreme right flank of the I Corps sector. While VMF-311 was working to prevent a penetration on the one flank, VMF-115 was faced with the identical situation on the opposite flank. Again the teamwork paid off as the Communists were forced to abandon their attempts to penetrate the American lines.[42]

Although nine aircraft received battle damage during April and one plane was damaged as the result of an operational accident, no pilots were injured or wounded and the squadron enjoyed its second straight month with aircraft availability averaging over 94 percent. Much of the credit for the success of the squadron went to the maintenance personnel, who in the unit's command diary of April 1953, were described as "miracle workers." Considering that the unit had flown 741 combat sorties plus the fact the squadron was also transferring the remaining F9F-2Cs and accepting new F9F-5s, the title appears well deserved.

April also brought some happiness and a glimmer of hope as the enemy released 684 captives of whom 149 were Americans. Of those freed 15 were Marines, though none were aviators. This release, which took place between 20 and 26 April 1953, was part of Operation Switch during which the United Nations Command (UNC) released a total of 6,670 Communist prisoners.[43]

During May the squadron continued close air support, interdiction, and combat air patrol missions as assigned by the FAF and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. In the execution of these missions, only six squadron aircraft received battle damage, but two aircraft were lost on 6 May as the unit sustained its first pilot casualty of 1953.

A flight of four F9Fs was returning from a close air support mission after working with the 7th ROK

USMC Photo A132958

A combat veteran of the Korean War. This F9F Panther jet from VMF-311 was one of the oldest combat planes of its kind in Korea. It had accumulated 445 combat missions and flown over 1,000 hours in Korea.

Infantry Division, when the flight ran into bad weather. By the time the planes arrived in the Pohang (K-3) area, the field was almost completely obscured by low clouds. The first two planes sighted the field and landed but the second section became lost while orbiting the field trying to spot the runway. Because of the limited fuel remaining, the jets were unable to divert so the alternatives were land, ditch, or bail out. One pilot, Captain Joseph N. Carruthers ditched his aircraft at sea and was rescued by a helicopter about an hour later. The other pilot, Captain Joe D. Bailes, continued descending, expecting to spot the field through the overcast, when his plane struck the top of a small mountain. The crash was observed by some Korean police who reported the accident and confirmed that the pilot had been killed.[44]

Bad weather continued to hamper flight operations, but the time was well utilized by the maintenance section to pull acceptance checks on replacement aircraft and to perform the necessary maintenance to keep the aircraft availability above 90 percent. During the entire month of May, there were only seven aircraft which aborted missions due to maintenance problems. The squadron was rightfully proud of its ability to respond to a mission, and the pilots attributed this capability to the men of the maintenance section.

In addition to combat operations in May, the squadron also provided air defense for a 1st Marine Division amphibious training exercise at the Yongjong-ni beaches on the west coast near Kunsan. The 1st Marine Division in April, after 20 months on the line, had been relieved by the Army's 25th Infantry Division and became the I Corps reserve. The 1st Marine Division effectively used this time for "continued improvement of amphibious and ground offensive combat capabilities," anticipating the return to the front which would come in June.[45]

Enemy antiaircraft fire kept the maintenance section jumping during June as 15 of the jets returned from missions with battle damage. This damage was readily accepted, however, by squadron personnel since no planes were lost and no pilots were missing or injured.

"If the monsoon rains of July hung like a shroud over the infantryman, they were an even more serious impediment to the air operations of MAG-12 and -33." There were 24 days of restricted flying and 12 full days during which air operations were canceled entirely.[46]

When nearly a week of inclement weather finally lifted, the squadron welcomed a brisk change in the tempo of operations. The 1st Marine Division had moved back on line. On 11 July, the Chinese fortifications north of the 7th Marines' sector were attacked. Combined flights with VMF-115 were again utilized on 14 July. Twenty Panther jets swooped over enemy territory from sunrise to sunset, unleasing 25 tons of rocket and bombs north of the troubled 7th Marines and an additional 9 tons on hostile emplacements near the western end of the division line.[47]

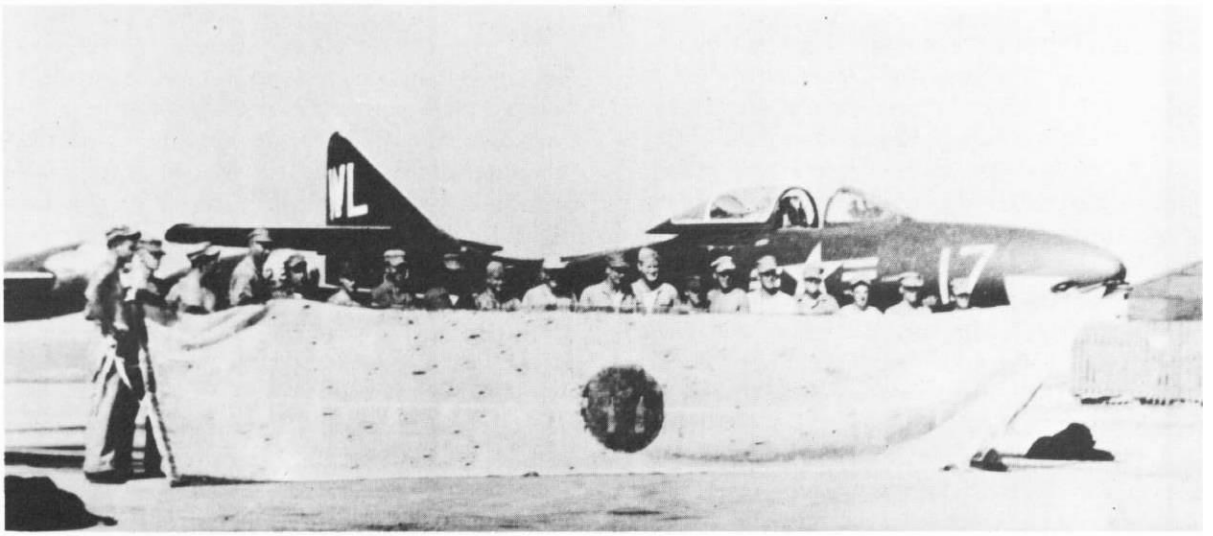
On 17 July, Captain Robert I. Nordell, flying his third mission that day, and his wingman, First Lieutenant Frank L. Keck, Jr., were hit by intense automatic weapons fire while on an interdiction flight. Their planes reportedly went down at 2000 over the Sea of Japan. After a 4-day search they were declared missing and subsequently reclassified as killed in action.[48]

Also on the 17th, Captain Harold F. Hagans was forced to ditch his aircraft after it was set afire by small arms fire. Captain Hagans received only minor injuries and was promptly rescued and returned to Pohang, but the squadron had lost its third aircraft of the day. An additional plane had been lost earlier in the month when the jet blast from one F9F ignited 20mm ammunition on the plane manned by Captain William B. Clem. The pilot got safely out of the aircraft, but the jet was destroyed.[49]

On the morning of 25 July, the Chinese again assaulted elements of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines from positions in the vicinity of Marine-held Hills 119 and 111. Air support was requested and F9Fs from VMF-311 and -115 responded. Between 0616 and 1036, they bombarded the enemy with more than 32 tons of explosives as the 7th Marines stubbornly held its ground. The enemy's attack on the Marine positions constituted the major action in the I Corps during what was to be the final 10 days of the war. The Communists had gained a few miles of territory, but at the cost of an estimated 72,000 casualties including more than 25,000 killed.[50]

After 3 years, 1 month, and 2 days, the so-called "police action" in Korea ended on 27 July 1953 with the signing of an armistice agreement at Panmunjom.

For the 7,035 Marine officers and men on duty with Major General Vernon E. Megee's 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, the final day of the war was an active one. Corsairs, Skyraiders, and Panther jets mounted



USMC Photo A332596

Victorious pilots and crewmen hold the gunnery sleeve, which had been riddled with hits by VMF-311 pilots during a gunnery meet in Korea. VMF-311 pilots captured first through fourth places in the individual competition as well as placing first in overall squadron standings.

222 sorties and blasted the enemy with 354 tons of high explosives along the front. The last Marine jet pilot in action was Captain William I. Armagost of VMF-311. He smashed a Communist supply point with four 500-pounders, at 1835, declaring his flight felt "just like the last winning play of a football game."[51] The wing closed out its part in the Korean War just 35 minutes before the cease-fire.

In the $2^1/_2$ years that VMF-311 spent in Korea, it amassed a total of 18,851 combat sorties. Now it was time to slow down the pace. Instead of combat missions the pilots were now flying training flights in order to maintain a high level of readiness in the event hostilities were resumed. Time, however, was available for both the officers and the men to participate in recreational activities and to enjoy the postwar calm.

In September the unit's strength was reduced slightly to 39 officers and 174 enlisted men, yet 741 hours were flown as the pilots continued their training flights. Until 22 December, the squadron flew without an accident, but on that day Second Lieutenant Charles H. Bishop experienced an engine flame-out and although he safely ejected, the plane was lost at sea.

By the end of the year, the squadron's men had improved the working spaces to allow themselves a little more comfort. The pilots made themselves a new briefing room as their contribution to the effort. Most men participated in group athletic tournaments during their off-duty time, but the one event in which all Marines actively participated was prophesying the squadron's fate for the coming year.

The new year brought little change for the 33 officers and 165 enlisted men who now made up VMF-311. The only excitement to break the monotony occurred on 16 January 1954 when the squadron was placed on a 30-minute alert beginning an hour prior to sunrise and ending an hour after sunset. This alert, caused by South Korea's release of nonrepatriated prisoners of war, was finally canceled by the Joint Operations Center on 23 January.

During February, in order that all units were prepared for further combat in the event the current armistice was not honored by the Communists, specific tasks were assigned for each unit. VMF-311 was assigned tasks both as a Marine unit and as element of Task Force 91, commanded by the Commanding General, Fifth Air Force. The tasks assigned as a Marine fighter squadron were:

1. To intercept and destroy enemy aircraft in conjunction with ground and airborne fighter direction, during daylight hours.
2. Within the capability of the assigned aircraft, to intercept and destroy enemy aircraft in conjunction with ground fighter direction, during the hours of darkness and foul weather conditions.
3. To conduct offensive operations against enemy aircraft, airborne and on the ground.
4. To provide fighter escort of friendly aircraft.

5. Within the capability of the assigned aircraft, perform strikes against enemy installations, close air support missions, interdiction missions, and to perform operations against enemy surface targets.

6. To perform visual reconnaissance missions.

7. Have the capability to operate from aircraft carriers.

8. Have the capability to depart from and return to their base during the hours of darkness and during foul weather conditions.

As an element of Task Force 91, the following tasks were assigned:

A. Destruction of enemy aircraft.

B. Perform close air support missions in support of the United Nations ground forces.

C. Perform interdiction of enemy ground lines of communication.

D. Perform armed reconnaissance missions and offensive strikes against the enemy.

E. Escort and provide cover for United Nation forces on land, sea, and in the air.

F. Provide air defense of military installations.

G. To maintain aircraft on alert status as prescribed by the Commanding General, Fifth Air Force.

H. To be able to deploy as directed.

I. To be ready to operate Fifth Air Force installations when ordered to by and in accordance with directives from the Commanding General, Fifth Air Force.[12]

Since most of the experienced combat pilots had rotated back to the United States, the squadron continued to fly in excess of 1,000 hours a month in order to achieve maximum readiness.

On 17 May 1954, tragedy interrupted the placid squadron routine. Second Lieutenant Willard E. Miller, while on a routine training flight, experienced aircraft difficulties and was forced to ditch his F9F off the east coast of Korea. The landing was good, but Miller drowned before a helicopter arrived on the scene. The cause of the accident and the subsequent drowning remained undetermined.

With combat readiness as the primary concern throughout Korea, two major exercises were conducted in which the squadron participated. The first was Marine Landing Exercise (MarLEx) VI, an amphibious landing by the 5th Marines with the air cover supplied by MAG-33. Bad weather prevailed during most of the exercise, and the squadron was able to provide little air support.

Later, on 28 June, VMF-311 participated in the Air Force's Operation Homeplate, designed to test the defenses of the U. S. airbases in Korea. The squadron was employed as part of the defending forces, while several Air Force units assumed the enemy's role and attempted to penetrate the airfields' defenses.

On 21 June 1954, Lieutenant Colonel Michael R. Yunck assumed command of the squadron for the third time. Lieutenant Colonel Yunck remained in this position for 4 tranquil months. From 7 to 10 September, the 1st MAW held an air-to-air and an air-to-ground gunnery meet with MAGs -11, -12, and -33 competing. Not only did the squadron team, led by Lieutenant Colonel Yunck, score a decisive victory in the meet, but VMF-311 pilots also captured first through fourth places in the individual competition. In addition to the skipper, the squadron's "big guns" were Major James J. Larkin, First Lieutenant Robert J. Fagot, and First Lieutenant James F. Browne.

During the period of 1 October through 31 December 1954, the squadron maintained an average aircraft availability of 86.9 percent while flying a total of 3,118 flight hours. Aside from the normal training, the pilots participated in four more MarLEx operations providing simulated close air support for the Marine ground forces. On 26 November, the squadron experienced its first operational accident since May. While on a routine cross-country flight, Second Lieutenant John F. Watson, Jr., was killed when his plane crashed as a result of a midair collision in the vicinity of Pyongtaek (K-6), Korea.

With the arrival of a new year, the squadron continued to busy itself by maintaining the 1,000 flight hours per month average. Despite the cold and snow, the VMF-311 jets accumulated 3,181 flight hours during the first quarter of 1955.

By 1 April 1955 the word was out that it would not be much longer before MAG-33 would be heading home. All routine periodic inspections were performed on the jets, aircraft maintenance was completed, and test hops were flown in order to ready the aircraft for their final flight before being shipped to the United States. Finally, on 18 April 1955, the last of the squadron's planes were ferried from K-3 to the Naval Air Station at Iwakuni, Japan. Also on the 18th, the forward echelon of the unit was airlifted to Iwakuni while the rear echelon completed the final packing and crating of the shop equipment. On 27 April the squadron command moved to Iwakuni. By the end of April, Marine Air Repair Squadron 17 had all the aircraft preserved for the voyage home.

The aircraft were barged from Iwakuni to the carrier USS *Princeton* (CVS 37) on 12 May and were lifted on board without mishap. The following day, the squadron under the command of Major Manning T. Jannell, later a brigadier general, sailed on board the *Princeton* for California. Meanwhile, the

squadron equipment and the remaining 3 officers and 22 enlisted men at Yongil-man Airfield (K-3) were trucked to Pohang and loaded onto trains for shipment to Pusan. By 23 May, the equipment was loaded in the cargo ships USS *Washburn* (AKA 108) and USS *Union* (AKA 106), and on 25 May 1955, the remainder of VMF-311 sailed for California. For the 9 officers and 170 enlisted men of VMF-311, Korea was now history.

The Post-Korean Period: 1955-1965

On 31 May 1955, VMF-311 arrived at San Diego, California, and moved at once to MCAS El Toro as part of MAG-33, Air FMFPac. As was typical of a unit returning from overseas duty, the squadron underwent a period of turmoil as new people were absorbed and many of the squadron veterans were reassigned to other units.

About the time the squadron had most of its aircraft ready for flight operations, the crates unpacked, and the working spaces prepared, a new commanding officer arrived. On 21 June Lieutenant Colonel James E. Johnson relieved Major Jannell.

The next 4 months were spent getting the squadron firmly established in its new spaces, familiarizing the pilots with the El Toro operating area, and shaking the cobwebs out of the aircraft after their long journey.[1]

In August the headquarters element of the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing left Miami, Florida, for a new home at El Toro, and by September the wing was firmly established in southern California. Consisting solely of support squadrons and Marine Photographic Squadron 3, the 3d MAW was about to absorb most of the Air FMFPac units in the area and become the largest Marine aircraft wing. On 15 September, MAG-33 joined the 3d MAW.

Training became paramount for the squadron, and by the end of 1955 the new pilots were flying like veterans. The routine of ground training including rifle and pistol requalification and personnel inspections replaced the close air support missions, enemy antiaircraft fire, and the miserable winters of Korea.

In early February, before the peacetime routine could become too monotonous, the 3d MAW announced that it would conduct a fighter and attack gunnery meet in which all tactical squadrons of MAG-15 and -33 would compete. The meet, scheduled for the last week in March at the Marine Corps Auxiliary Air Station (MCAAS), Mojave consisted of both air-to-air and air-to-ground phases. The air-to-ground phase had four events: strafing runs, rocket firing, altitude bombing, and skip bombing. The air-to-air competition consisted of gunnery events at 12,000 and 20,000 feet.

VMF-311 immediately began the process of selecting the most capable pilots for what promised to be one of the hottest aerial contests ever held. The tempo of training increased for every squadron during those final weeks which preceded the meet. In addition to the pilots, the squadron needed a ground crew that was well trained to ensure that the planes were properly armed and that the chance of misfires were reduced in every way possible. To select and prepare this team, the squadron turned to the ordnance chief, Master Sergeant Earl T. Gray, winner of the Navy Cross in Nicaragua and an expert in the ordnance field.

When the big event came, the VMF-311 team, led by Captain Herbert V. Lundin, took first place in the air-to-air phase in the fighter category and finished third in the overall competition. The air-to-air competition was won in the last event of the final day of the meet when the gunnery team, led by Lieutenant Colonel Johnson, finished first in the gunnery shoot at 20,000 feet.

During May and June the pilots underwent extensive periods of field carrier landing practice (FCLP) in preparation for a July deployment which for many would be their first carrier qualification in a tactical aircraft. Preparations went well as the squadron moved from day to night FCLPs. Then on 18 July, the squadron moved on board the carrier USS *Bennington* (CVS 20) for 2 weeks of carrier landings, during which the pilots made an average of 17 landings each. In total, the squadron logged more than 600 carrier landings without an accident. The deployment was climaxed by the unit's participation in an amphibious exercise conducted by the 1st Marine Division, during which the squadron flew simulated close air support missions.

In September, the squadron received a 3d MAW aviation safety award for the period April through June 1956. Unfortunately, the award quickly became part of the unit's history when on 26 September, First Lieutenant Donald W. Kifer crashed just south of El Toro. While conducting FCLPs, Lieutenant Kifer's jet lost power on the downwind leg. His only recourse was to make a forced landing in a bean field. After bouncing and sliding for some 200 yards, the

F9F burst into flames just as Lieutenant Kifer was seen "sprinting with Olympic like strides" as he escaped uninjured.

The squadron continued normal operations, and in October was again preparing for another deployment, this time to MCAAS Mojave for 2 weeks. Its deployment served two purposes: first the squadron would use the gunnery and bombing ranges available at Mojave, and secondly, the departure of VMF-311 from El Toro would make room for the Reserve squadrons arriving for their annual training period.

Later in the month, a carrier air group composed of VMF-311, -314, -224, and Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 3 (VMCJ-3) conducted an air exercise during which the air group made the first landings on board the carrier USS *Hornet* (CVA 12) since the ship had received her new angled deck.

The next activity in which the squadron became involved was an air-ground landing exercise (AGLEx) in the Camp Pendleton area. The exercise, AGLEx 57-G, conducted from 29 November to 6 December, involved approximately 1,200 Marines from seven squadrons of the 3d MAW. The task assigned to VMF-311 was that of providing close air support during the amphibious landing and operations ashore. The squadron, along with VMF-314, packed its equipment and flew to the hypothetical carrier which was actually MCAAS Mojave. During the operation, the squadron had the opportunity to operate with helicopter units for the first time as Marine Helicopter Squadrons 361 and 362 provided the airlift for assault forces that were assigned to an inland objective. Later during the exercise, the jets also provided "cover" for the helicopters as they flew simulated medical evacuation missions.

With the arrival of 1957, the squadron again packed its bags to support another AGLEx; this one was AGLEx India. During the third week in January, the unit moved again to Mojave for a 2-week stay at what was beginning to seem like the desert home of VMF-311. During this exercise, the squadron flew 236 sorties in support of the AGLEx and an incredible 736 sorties in just 13 flying days. Lieutenant Colonel Harold L. Lantz, the commanding officer of VMF-311, credited the maintenance and engineering sections for the outstanding results achieved during this deployment stating that "an aircraft squadron is only as good in the air as its enlisted men are on the ground."[2]

March 1957 found the unit back at Mojave, this time preparing for the upcoming 3d MAW weapons meet. Optimism prevailed throughout the squadron area and the team captain, Lieutenant Colonel Lantz, announced, "We have already placed our order for a nice new cabinet to hold all our trophies."[3]

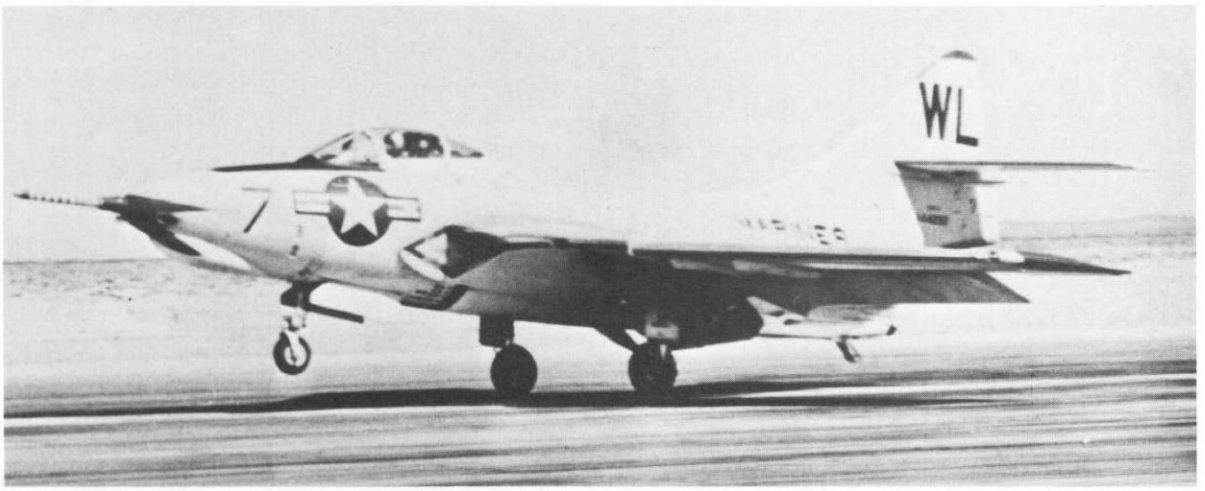
After a week of vigorous flying, the VMF-311 team was selected. In addition to the commanding officer, the team consisted of Captain Joe A. Lindsey, Captain Herbert V. Lundin, First Lieutenant Robert R. Norton, First Lieutenant Gene H. Purvis, and Second Lieutenant David B. Fite.

By 22 March the results of the meet were being discussed at happy hour by a satisfied 311 team. The squadron had captured first place in the attack phase and finished second in the overall meet standings with a score of 2,810, just 57 points behind VMF-314 who took home the top honors. The VMF-311 team also won two individual trophies as Captain Lundin clinched the overall individual honors by taking first place in the air-to-ground phase and a second place in the air-to-air phase. The second place individual trophy also found its way into the squadron's trophy cabinet when Lieutenant Norton captured second in the air-to-air competition. Winning 8 of the 18 events, the squadron convincingly proved its capabilities as a combat ready force.

During this period, also, the squadron began to be referred to as the "Tomcats." Although there is no evidence as to the exact time that the insignia was adopted, the El Toro newspaper, *Flight Jacket*, first put the nickname into print during the gunnery meet in March.

The insignia of the Tomcat was destined to change during the next few years (see appendix D), but the nickname would remain and become as well-known as the reputation of the squadron.

Beginning during the latter part of March, the squadron began receiving the newer Grumman F9F-8 Cougar to replace the F9F-5s they had acquired in Korea. This made VMF-311 the first West Coast squadron to possess this new fighter. The F9F-8, first assigned to an operational squadron in 1955, was a swept-wing, single-seat fighter with an improved Pratt and Whitney J-48 engine. The new engine increased the thrust by 1,000 pounds to a total of 7,250. The fuselage was similar to that of the Panther, but new 35-degree swept-wings and tail were incorporated. Two self-sealing fuel tanks were located in the fuselage, and two 150-gallon drop tanks could be carried on under-wing bomb shackles. The armament on the Cougar consisted of four nose-



USMC Photo A332597

A new VMF-311 Grumman F9F-8 Cougar taking off from MCAAS Mojave. The F9F-8 replaced the older F9F-5s, which the squadron had acquired in Korea.

mounted 20mm cannons and under-wing racks for either four 1,000-pounds bombs, six high velocity aircraft rockets (HVAR), or four Philco/Martin Sidewinder air-to-air missiles. The new Cougar had a service ceiling of 42,000 feet and a maximum airspeed of 712 mph.[4]

The transition to the new swept-wing fighter went smoothly and by the end of March most pilots had been given the opportunity to try their hand in the new machine. In May the squadron was presented another award to add to its expanding collection, the Air FMFPac Aviation Safety Award for the first quarter of the calendar year 1957. This award was given in recognition of the 2,482 accident-free flight hours accumulated during the period, the unit's achievements in the 3d MAW gunnery meet, and the safe accomplishment of the flight training syllabus.

On 11 May, Lieutenant Colonel Lantz left his post as commanding officer of VMF-311 to become the executive officer of MCAAS Mojave. Upon completion of the Marine Corps Command and Staff School in June, Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Smith, Jr., assumed the duties as the new skipper of the Tomcat squadron. Throughout the remainder of May, the squadron made the preparations for its deployment to Mojave where the pilots would be given the opportunity to put the Cougar through its paces on the gunnery and bombing ranges.

On 1 June 1957, the role of 311 as a fighter squadron came to an end when the unit was redesignated Marine Attack Squadron (VMA)* 311. The redesignation did not require any organizational restructuring, nor did it create any difficulties for the squadron. Rather it simply emphasized a mission that the squadron had already aptly performed both in World War II and in Korea.[5]

After a successful deployment to Mojave, the Tomcats returned to El Toro in late June and settled down to the task of completing the training syllabus in the Cougar. The training went well as the ground crews kept the jets flying and the pilots continued to add to the total of accident-free hours.

By the turn of the year, the Tomcats were ready to show what the F9F-8 could do. The chance came during the last week in February when the squadron deployed again to Mojave. During the 10 flying days deployed, VMA-311 logged 709 sorties totaling nearly 1,030 flying hours. A majority of the assigned pilots qualified in all ordnance phases of the squadron syllabus as they expended over 1,400 bombs, 745 rockets, and 13,000 rounds of 20mm ammunition. Ten pilots who had joined the unit just a few days before it departed for Mojave flew an average of 25

*Prior to this period, many fighter squadrons performed both the attack missions and fighter missions. The designation of attack squadrons created units with a primary mission of supporting ground operations, while fighter squadrons concentrated on air-to-air combat. This, in turn, led to the development of aircraft designed primarly for either the attack or fighter role.

USMC Photo A332598

A flight of four F9F-8 Cougars from VMA-311 over the west coast. The squadron had recently been redesignated from VMF to VMA-311.

hours and completed the initial familiarization phase of the prescribed syllabus.

Shortly after returning from the desert, the squadron received word that it would be one of three squadrons representing the Marine Corps in the Naval Air Weapons Meet to be held in April at Naval Air Facility El Centro. Lieutenant Colonel Smith and his team, which included Major Charles R. Howe, Major Dale L. Ward, Captain John W. Detroy, and First Lieutenant Fredrick S. Zitkowski, immediately began practicing for the coming event.

Between 14 and 18 April 1958, the Tomcats competed in the air-to-ground phase of the weapons meet. After all scores were in, VMA-311 captured first place in the rocket event and finished a respectable fourth in the overall competition. Captain Detroy added to the squadron's honors when he finished first in the air-to-ground individual competition and was awarded the coveted Herman Trophy.

During the early months of 1958 the Tomcat pilots were also involved in learning the fundamentals of air-to-air refueling. VMA-311 later became the first West Coast squadron to be completely qualified in this new facet of Marine aviation. Through the use of inflight refueling, the duration of a flight was no longer limited by the amount of fuel a plane could carry. A tanker aircraft, which could be one of several types of aircraft configured for that purpose, would fly to a predesignated position and the plane requiring fuel would then join behind the tanker. The tanker would reel out a refueling hose with a basket-shaped receptacle known as a drogue on the end. The aircraft requiring fuel would position a refueling probe into the drogue opening a pressure valve and allowing fuel to flow. When sufficient fuel was received, the fueled plane would then reduce speed thereby breaking the connection at the pressure valve terminating the operation.[6]

Beginning in the summer of 1958, VMA-311 began receiving light attack aircraft to replace the squadron's fighter aircraft. The new aircraft assigned was the Douglas A4D-2 Skyhawk, later redesignated the A-4B. This single-seated, lightweight attack bomber was less than half the size of, but superior in performance to, many operational jet fighters. Designed on a completely functional basis with emphasis on simplification of structure and equipment, and powered by a Wright J-65 turbojet engine which produced 7,700 pounds of thrust, the A-4B was well suited for the attack role. Two 20mm cannons were mounted in the wing roots and the three attachment points under the wings and fuselage could accommodate rockets, torpedoes, missiles, and a wide variety of bombs. The Skyhawk could fly faster over greater distances than any other aircraft of its type. On 15 October 1955, the Skyhawk established a new world's speed record over the 500-kilometer closed circuit at Edwards AFB with a speed of 615.163 mph. Additionally, since the jet was small enough to fit standard aircraft carrier elevators without the need for folding wings, it could be operated from any carrier.[7]

During the fall of 1958, VMA-311 continued training to achieve the same proficiency and professionalism that it had previously attained with other aircraft. Particular emphasis was placed on "special weapons" training as the squadron added the capability of nuclear weapons delivery to its mission. The hard work and constant training paid off in September when the squadron was chosen as the winner of the Chief of Naval Operations Annual Safety Award for 1958. Vice Admiral Robert E.

The Douglas A4D-2, later designated the A-4B, Skyhawk was a single-seat, lightweight attack bomber. VMA-311 started receiving A4D-2s during the summer of 1958.

USMC Photo A332606

Pirie, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Air, commended the squadron for the outstanding safety record achieved while transitioning to the new jet aircraft.

For the next few months the squadron remained at El Toro completing the yearly ground training requirements. Even in this area VMA-311 distinguished itself when on 16 September, Captain Milton T. Hefty, electronics officer for the unit, established a new rifle range record by firing a remarkable 243 of a possible 250 points.

The year 1959 marked a period of instability for the squadron both in location and in personnel. Large numbers of officers and enlisted men were continually on temporary additional duty. Permanent change of station orders brought in many new faces while the squadron lost several of its well-trained personnel.

During April, the unit became one of the first Marine squadrons to be deployed to the newly designated Marine Corps Auxiliary Air Station, Yuma, Arizona, which originally had been Vincent AFB. While deployed from 12-24 April, the squadron's ordnance crews worked long into the night keeping the A-4s armed with bombs and rockets. By the end of the month, the unit had set a new monthly flight hour record for an A-4 squadron with a total of 1,042 hours. Lieutenant Colonel David D. Rickabaugh, who had become the commanding officer, stated that the hours and sorties flown were syllabus hops which contributed greatly to the squadron's combat readiness capability.

The new concept of inflight refueling received increased recognition after MAG-13 pilots flew 24 North American FJ-4B Furies from Hawaii to Japan in October 1958 and when Colonel Homer G. Hutchinson, Jr., who retired as a brigadier general, organized and led the first Douglas A-4D Skyhawk nonstop crossing of the Altantic Ocean. Colonel Hutchinson's flight from Argentia, Newfoundland, to Rota, Spain, was accomplished in a little over 5 hours. Marine squadrons began practicing not only refueling from tankers, but also from other fighters and attack aircraft through a method called the "buddy system." During the squadron's course of training, inflight refueling was practiced between the A-4s and also with the Chance Vought F8U-1 Crusaders of VMF-251. With this new capability, aircraft were given a greater operational-range potential.

USMC Photo A332595

Major General Charles H. Hayes, CG 3d MAW, congratulates VMA-311 pilots on their selection to represent 3d MAW in the 1959 gunnery meet at MCAAS Yuma. Standing behind General Hayes is Lieutenant Colonel Paul A. Lemaire, Jr., the squadron commander; in ranks in front of the general are Major James W. Baker (partially hidden), Major Leonard A. Miller, First Lieutenant Samuel P. Brutcher (shaking hands), and First Lieutenant Harold G. Haffner.

Throughout the spring and summer months, the squadron flew many close air support missions at Camp Pendleton and participated in the 1st Marine Division's Twin Peaks exercise. Deployments to Yuma became routine as the desert was home to the Tomcats more than a dozen times during the year.

In the fall of 1959, VMA-311 was one of two 3d MAW squadrons selected to compete in Operation Top Gun, the Fourth Annual Naval Air Gunnery Meet, at MCAAS Yuma.* The squadron was selected through a competitive elimination in which all tactical squadrons of the wing participated. The Tomcat team which was entered in the light attack category consisted of the squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul A. Lemaire, Jr., Major James W. Baker, Major Leonard A. Miller, First Lieutenant Samuel P. Brutcher, and First Lieutenant Harold G. Haffner. Leading the team's maintenance detachment was Captain Joseph Castro.

On 4 December, after 5 days of competition, the scores were tallied and VMA-311 finished third from a field of six squadrons entered in the light attack category.

*The other El Toro unit entered in the competition was Major Edward B. Crew's VMF(AW)-513 which was entered in the all-weather intercept category.

Before closing out the year, the squadron compiled 1,510 accident-free hours during the fourth quarter and was one of 15 aircraft squadrons to receive an AirFMFPac quarterly safety award.

After the arrival of the new decade had been celebrated appropriately, VMA-311 began preparing for a period of seemingly endless deployments. On 12 January 1960, the squadron relocated to NAS Fallon in Nevada where, until 22 January, the pilots underwent training in all phases of attack flying. The squadron returned to El Toro just long enough for the maintenance personnel to perform necessary checks, then the planes were airborne again, this time to MCAAS Yuma. From the 15th to the 17th of February, the Tomcats flew air support missions for Camp Pendleton units and then returned to El Toro.

While back at their home base, the Skyhawks were outfitted with a new multiple carriage bomb rack which enabled the attack jet to carry six 500-pound low-drag bombs on each wing. This rack was to be tested by the squadron at Yuma during its next deployment which came on 12 March. After 13 days in the desert, the squadron completed not only the satisfactory evaluation of the bomb rack, but also the familiarization syllabus for several newly joined pilots. While deployed, the Tomcats flew 707 hours despite $1^1/_2$ days of high desert winds during which time the planes were grounded.

On 3 May 1960, while returning from a cross-country flight to El Paso, Texas, First Lieutenant Neal C. Dadurka, the squadron's assistant material officer, was fatally injured when his Skyhawk crashed five miles south of Lake Elsinore near March AFB. Dadurka was attempting to make an emergency landing on a 3,000-foot strip after his aircraft lost its hydraulic power.

After back-to-back deployments to MCAAS Yuma from 23 May to 2 June and to the Naval Air Facility, China Lake, California, for special weapons training from 12 to 25 June, the squadron returned to El Toro. An amphibious demonstration was planned for the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David M. Shoup, during which VMA-311 was directed to demonstrate the capabilities of the A-4 equipped with the multiple carriage rack. The squadron pilot selected to fly the A-4 was Captain William H. Fitch, later a general officer, the co-developer of the bomb rack. Captain Fitch was attached to Air Development Squadron 5 at China Lake in 1959 when he and Major Knowlton P. Rice developed the rack. On 29 June the Commandant witnessed Captain Fitch set a new ordnance delivery record for the A-4 as he successfully dropped 18 live bombs from this light attack aircraft.

For the majority of August the squadron was again at China Lake for additional training in special weapons. During the month CWO-4 John A. Scarborough and the men of his ordnance section also became proficient in the loading of these weapons as the pilots became qualified in the delivery methods.

From 25 September to 14 October, the squadron operated from the Auxilary Landing Field (ALF) San Clemente, California. While deployed, the Tomcats participated in a demonstration at Camp Pendleton staged for the Joint Civilian Orientation Conference. Besides showing that the A-4 could deliver more firepower than the World War II B-17 Flying Fortress, the jets flew bombing and strafing runs over a target area, while ground troops of the 1st Marine Division stormed their objectives from amphibious craft and MAG-36 helicopters.

Again, from 27 November to 9 December 1960, the squadron trained at Yuma. The Tomcats knew this would be the last opportunity for intensive training before the unit would begin packing for an extended deployment to the Far East. Besides the normal flight training, several of the younger pilots traded their flight suits for mechanic's overalls as they underwent a maintenance training program. This experience proved to be particularily valuable to the maintenance department because the pilots comments on the condition of the aircraft were concise and meaningful.

As the squadron closed out the year, the spirit of this unit could not be measured solely in terms of aeronautical achievements, but rather in the overall accomplishments of a professional Marine organization. More than 20 members of the squadron completed a Japanese language course in preparation for their deployment and more than one-half of the squadron was enrolled in off-duty education courses.

VMA-311 began 1961 by entering into the final phase of predeployment training—carrier qualifications. On 16 January, after 4,286 field mirror landings* at El Toro, the Tomcat pilots went on

*During field mirror landings, the pilots flew simulated carrier approaches to a runway using the shipboard lens equipment which reflected a beam of light off the stern of a carrier at an established angle. The pilots would intercept the beam and establish a rate of descent which would enable them to fly down the beam to an arrested landing. This procedure provided the pilots with a means of landing on board a carrier at night and during inclement weather, as well as assisting during normal day landings.

board the carrier USS *Oriskany* (CVA 34) for both the day and night qualification phase. By 8 February, the pilots had completed the required number of "cat-shots" and "traps"* without a mishap. During the qualification period, Second Lieutenant Frank J. Horak, Jr., became the first Marine aviator to complete a "thousandth" landing on the carrier when he registered the 51,000th landing on 17 January. On 2 February, Captain Bertram W. McCauley, a seasoned Skyhawk pilot, recorded the 52,000th landing. In total, the squadron logged 843 landings on board the *Oriskany* without so much as a blown tire.

On 18 March, with all training completed, the officers and men of VMA-311 left El Toro to begin their 13-month tour of duty in the Far East with the 1st MAW. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Ray D. Rushlow, the squadron's 30th commanding officer, they boarded the transports of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron (VMGR) 352 and were flown to NAS Alameda where Military Air Transport Service (MATS) aircraft provided the planes for the trans-Pacific flight. The squadron aircraft were preserved, put in ships of the Military Sea Transport Service (MSTS), and shipped to Japan without incident.

On 23 March, VMA-311, now located at NAS Atsugi, Japan, became part of MAG-12, 1st MAW. On 28 March 1961, the aircraft arrived and squadron personnel immediately set about the task of preparing the jets for flight operations. By 3 April the planes were ready. On the following day, VMA-311 flew on board the carrier USS *Coral Sea* (CVA 43) and became part of Carrier Air Group (CAG) 15, Seventh Fleet. While attached to the *Coral Sea*, administrative control of the squadron remained with the 1st MAW while operational control was passed to the CAG.

The primary mission of this attack squadron was not close air support, but because of its training at China Lake, it was assigned the responsibility of special weapons delivery. The squadron's association with the *Coral Sea* was short lived. The carrier USS *Midway* (CVA 41) arrived in Japanese waters on 12 April to relieve the *Coral Sea*. The following day the squadron moved on board the *Midway* and joined CAG-2.[9]

On 3 May 1961, exactly one year after First Lieutenant Dadurka was killed in California, the squadron lost another pilot. Just before dusk, as the ship was steaming in the South China Sea, First Lieutenant Joseph S. Andre was catapulted off the deck for a routine flight when his Skyhawk flew into the water about a mile off the bow. The cause of the accident was unknown.[10]

The squadron remained as part of the Seventh Fleet force in readiness until 3 June, at which time the 1st MAW regained operational control of the unit and assigned it to MAG-12 at the Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) Iwakuni.[11]

On the last day on board the *Midway*, Second Lieutenant Harold L. Frohriep was forced to eject from his A-4 when, about 25 miles from the ship, he noticed that his aircraft was on fire. From an altitude of 2,000 feet, he successfully ejected from the burning jet and parachuted into the choppy sea. After less than an hour in his small liferaft, the destroyer USS *Chevalier* (DD 805) picked him up and transferred him by highline back to the *Midway*.[12]

While at Iwakuni, the squadron continued training in special weapons and navigation. In order to maintain its carrier capability, mirror landing practice became a regular event on the flight schedule. In addition to local flying, the Tomcats had the opportunity to show their presence in South Korea as the pilots delivered ordnance on the target ranges in the vicinity of Osan.

From July through December 1961, VMA-311 made five deployments to the U. S. Naval Facility (USNF) Naha, Okinawa. During these deployments, the squadron added realism to the 3d Marine Division maneuvers in the vicinity of Camp Hansen by dropping napalm, bombs, and rockets. The Tomcats also made considerable use of the bomb and rocket ranges on Ie Shima, a small island a few miles off the northwest coast of Okinawa where war correspondent Ernie Pyle was killed during the latter stages of World War II.[13]

In order to remain completely ready to reassume the role of a shipboard squadron, the 311 pilots underwent two requalification periods on board the carrier USS *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA 31). A few of the pilots requalified on 4 and 5 October, but the majority of the pilots fulfilled the requirement during the second period, 9-18 December.[14]

For the next few months the members of the squadron remained at MCAF Iwakuni training and enjoying the local scenery and hospitality offered in the many small Japanese villages surrounding the base complex.

*Cat-shot and trap refer to the catapult launch and the arrested landing of aircraft on board a carrier.

One squadron metalsmith, Staff Sergeant Gus A. Pierce, utilized his spare time to design a new survival kit which could be dropped to downed pilots until a rescue could be made. In the past, it was found that some survival kits would break upon impact with the ground or would float away in the water. Sergeant Pierce's design called for a modified drop tank capable of containing nearly 100 pounds of survival equipment. By using a parachute, the equipment could be landed undamaged on the ground and the chute would act as a sea anchor in the water. For his imaginative design, Sergeant Pierce was commended by Lieutenant Colonel Rushlow during a meritorious mast and was presented a letter of appreciation from the Commanding General of the 1st MAW, Major General John P. Condon, a former commanding officer of 311.[15]

As the Far East deployment drew to a close, the squadron was scheduled for one final exercise before packing its equipment and heading home. This exercise, named Tulungan, was hosted by the Philippine Army and was the 20th SEATO exercise to be held. Tulungan was conducted on the Philippine Island of Mindoro with Australian, Philippine, and American forces participating. From 2 March to 12 April 1962, VMA-311 flew close air support missions from a short airfield for tactical support (SATS)* which lacked any support facilities except the squadron's general purpose tents. The tropical heat and fine sand, which seemed to be blowing everywhere without an apparent breeze, added realism and misery to the simulated combat situation.[16] Had it not been for the hordes of Filipinos throughout the exercise area selling ice-cold San Miguel beer from pushcarts, the elements would have been even more bitter for the Marines. At it was, the local economy thrived by selling first its stock of beer, and then by selling the ice which was equally in demand.

Shortly after the SEATO exercise was over, the squadron moved to NAS Cubi Point just north of Manila and began loading its planes and equipment on board ships for the voyage home. The 24 officers and 105 enlisted men returning home boarded new Marine Lockheed GV-1 Hercules transports on 27 March 1962 and departed for California. After landing at Wake Island and NAS Barbers Point in Hawaii, the personnel of VMA-311 deplaned once again at El Toro.[17]

On 30 March 1962, VMA-311 rejoined MAG-15, 3d MAW and Major Harry Hunter, Jr., who had been selected for lieutenant colonel, became the new squadron commanding officer. Just as had happened after World War II, most of the personnel in the returning squadron were reassigned and by 4 April, VMA-311 consisted of five officers and eight enlisted men. By 30 April, however, 9 officers and 123 enlisted men, had established themselves as the nucleus of the new VMA-311. During the week of 14 May, the maintenance personnel began preparing the aircraft, which had recently arrived at NAS Alameda, for the flight to El Toro.

With less than 20 pilots, and most of them new to the Skyhawk, the squadron deployed for one week to MCAAS Yuma on 10 June to begin its training. While Lieutenant Colonel Hunter was attending a weapons evaluation course at the Army's Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah, the executive officer, Major Harold L. Sharkey, headed the Yuma detachment. With the joining process finally completed, on 21 August 1962, the Tomcats departed for NAS Alameda for 10 days of live ordnance training. The pilots had the opportunity to fly familiarization hops in napalm delivery, loft bombing, strafing, and rocket firing.

Throughout the remainder of 1962, the squadron had numerous two-week ordnance practices at Alameda and Yuma and participated in several exercises including Operation Skyshield in September. For Skyshield, VMA-311 furnished the aggressor aircraft for the 1,600-plane readiness exercise conducted by the North American Air Defense Command.

By 5 December 1962, the Tomcats had flown 10,000 accident-free hours since Lieutenant Andre was killed on 3 May 1961. The next goal the squadron set for itself was 15,000 hours.

On 6 March 1963, jets and helicopters from the 3d MAW went into action in support of the landing phase of Operation Steel Gate at Camp Pendleton. VMA-311, along with other squadrons of MAGs-15 and -33, supported both the 1st Marine Division's vertical envelopment and the amphibious assaults across Pendleton's beaches.

During the last 2 weeks in April, the squadron again deployed to Yuma where the pilots concentrated on special weapons training, as well as

*SATS—a portable, reusable runway system which can be installed in 72 hours. Interlocking sections of aluminum matting is used to construct a runway having the characteristics of a aircraft carrier deck including an arresting gear.

maintaining their proficiency in conventional ordnance delivery. The unit was informed that soon after this deployment it would begin receiving the A-4E, the newest version in the A-4 series.

As is true of all squadrons, a chance to show hard earned skills is never passed up, especially when the audience includes the President of the United States. For VMA-311, this opportunity came on 6 June when President John F. Kennedy was viewing an amphibious assault demonstration at Camp Pendleton. The squadron, in supplying the close air support, showed the Commander-in-Chief how Marine A-4s could get down on the deck with the ground forces.

Finally on 19 June, after much anticipation, the Tomcats received the first three of their new A-4 jets. This made VMA-311 the first unit on the West Coast to possess this new attack aircraft. The A-4E, which at 43 feet was only 3 feet longer than the earlier version, was powered by a Pratt and Whitney J-52 turbojet which generated 8,500 pounds of thrust. Five bomb racks, two under each wing and one under the fuselage, could carry external loads weighing up to 8,200 pounds. The several variations of military stores it could carry included conventional bombs, nuclear weapons, and air-to-air or air-to-surface guided missiles. This aircraft, which weighed 9,300 pounds empty, had a maximum takeoff weight of 24,500 pounds and could achieve speeds in excess of 680 mph. By utilizing external fuel tanks, the A-4E was capable of an operational range of more than 2,000 miles.[18]

During August, the squadron was instructed to pack its equipment and prepare for a move on 1 September; however, this time the entire move would be within the confines of the El Toro perimeter. The move was from the MAG-15 area to a short distance away where the squadron was reassigned to MAG-33. Two reasons were given for the move: the first was to balance the squadrons between the two groups giving MAG-33 an attack capability; and secondly, to make more effective use of the spaces in both the MAG areas.

Before the squadron was even fully unpacked, the Tomcats were again involved in an air-ground exercise. Exercise Merit Badge, an amphibious landing of a Marine expeditionary brigade (MEB), began on 16 September 1963 and involved some 13,000 Marines and 22 ships. The exercise proved to be extremely valuable training for the new pilots and a good refresher for the old hands.

By mid-October, as the squadron went about the task of resuming normal operations in its new location, the Tomcats reached their 15,000th accident-free flight hour and were awarded a ninth consecutive AirFMFPac quarterly safety award. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel William L. Walker, attributed this achievement to the teamwork and respect which existed between the pilots and the ground crew members. The next goal for the squadron was set at 20,000 accident-free hours.

Before the end of the year arrived, the squadron managed to complete one more deployment to Yuma. Leaving El Toro on 8 December, the pilots spent 2 weeks sharpening their skills in ordnance delivery before returning to California for the holidays.

Because of the numerous scheduled deployments and exercises which involved squadron personnel, and in view of the recent relocation of the unit, the commanding officer decided to publish a weekly newspaper in order to pass the correct information before "rumor control" had everyone in a state of panic. In February 1964, the first edition of the Tomcats' newspaper, appropriately named "Sandbox," was published. The paper became a useful tool for the command to keep the men informed and to eliminate the flow of rumors.

Between 11 and 26 February, the squadron was back at Yuma practicing the several methods for delivery of special weapons. Practice with conventional weapons also contributed a major portion to the flight schedule.

By the end of March, the squadron had achieved 20,000 accident-free flight hours and was awarded its 11th consecutive safety award. The squadron was now looking to safely completing the necessary training to be fully combat ready prior to departing for the next tour in the Far East.

As training continued, the squadron entered the carrier qualification phase. First, it was mirror landing practice at El Toro, then, from 8-12 June, 14 pilots were qualified on board the carrier USS *Hornet* (CVS 12). A second deployment, this time on board the carrier USS *Yorktown* (CVS 10), came in early July and 15 more pilots became qualified, leaving 7 pilots to qualify during the final period scheduled for December.

Besides flight training, 18 pilots also had the opportunity to undergo 2 weeks of cold weather training at Bridgeport, California. This training,

USMC Photo A422403

Two Tomcats refueling from a Marine KC-130 on a nonstop cross-country flight from El Toro to Cherry Point. VMA-311 pilots completed the flight without a mishap.

conducted during September, included escape, evasion, and resistance to interrogation techiques.

In mid-November, eight of the squadron's A-4s made a nonstop flight from El Toro to Cherry Point as a rehearsal for the trans-Pacific flight scheduled for March 1965. The Skyhawk flight, led by the skipper, Lieutenant Colonel Bernard J. Stender, was refueled in the air by Marine KC-130 aircraft, and completed the cross-country flight without a mishap.

In December, the final carrier qualifications were completed; then, in January 1965, the squadron underwent a 2-week operational readiness inspection (ORI) in Yuma. The ORI, designed to move at a very rapid pace, tested the squadron's ability to adjust to a changing situation and to determine if the squadron was tactically ready. Upon the satisfactory completion of the ORI, the unit entered the final phase of preparation before the deployment to Japan—a deployment that coincided with mounting tensions and increasing U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia.

On 30 March, with all its equipment packed and the final preparations made on the aircraft, 20 A-4Es from VMA-311 departed California for Japan with the first en route stop being Hawaii. In preparation for the first aerial refueling, Lieutenant Colonel Stender brought the flight down from 31,000 feet to 20,000 feet and reduced his speed as he reached the rendezvous point. The KC-130 tankers were on station and ready to transfer fuel. The refueling operations went exactly as planned and the flight continued on to MCAS Kaneohe, Hawaii. Before reaching Japan, three additional in-flight refuelings were required, as well as a fuel stop on Wake Island. After more than 17 hours of flying which covered 6,187 miles, all 20 A-4s arrived safely at NAS Atsugi, Japan. The KC-130s in addition to being flying gas stations, also transported the squadron personnel and numerous tons of cargo. On 1 April 1965, VMA-311 was assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW located at MCAS Iwakuni.

The Vietnam Years: 1965-1973

On 11 April 1965, VMA-311, located at MCAS Iwakuni, was alerted to prepare for deployment with MAG-12 to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Five days later, the squadron's advance echelon consisting of 7 Marine officers, 117 enlisted men, 1 flight surgeon, and 1 corpsman, boarded the USS *Comstock* (LSD 19) and the USS *Washoe County* (LST 1165) with 229 tons of squadron equipment. Both vessels stopped at Okinawa, then proceeded to RVN arriving at Chu Lai at 0730, 24 May, where sand and 117 degree temperatures greeted the first Tomcats.

While units of MAG-12 were preparing to leave Japan, the Navy's Mobile Construction Battalion 10 (MCB-10) arrived at Chu Lai on 6 May and began constructing the airfield. When the advance echelon of VMA-311 reached Chu Lai, some of the personnel joined in preparation of camp, operational, and support facilities. The remainder, about 25 percent of the men, were assigned to the group security force

USMC Photo A194618

A VMA-311 Skyhawk is catapulted from the SATS field at Chu Lai, Vietnam. VMA-311 flew air missions from Chu Lai against the Communist forces in Vietnam.

and assisted in the construction of defensive positions.

By 31 May the SATS field was ready to receive its first aircraft. After a 1-day delay due to weather, the first VMA-311 jet arrived at 0835, 1 June piloted by Major Speed F. Shea. VMA-311 officially arrived at Chu Lai that afternoon when Lieutenant Colonel Stender landed at 1430. Although the squadron only had four aircraft in RVN, more were soon to follow. The units of MAG-12 then at Chu Lai included Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron (H&MS) 12, Marine Air Base Squadron (MABS) 12, a sub-unit of Marine Air Traffic Control Unit (MATCU) 67, a contingent of VMCJ-1, and VMAs-311, -225, and -214.

After the squadron working spaces were established and the pilots briefed, the anxious Tomcats were ready to begin flight operations. The first combat flight was airborne at 1108, 2 June 1965. Major John W. Parchen, the executive officer, leading four A-4s loaded with six 250-pounds bombs, two rocket pods, and 20mm rounds, bombed and strafed Viet Cong (VC) forces attacking Quang Ngai, approximately 20 miles south of Chu Lai. On 4 June, Lieutenant Colonel Stender's flight of four, including two planes from VMA-225, sighted and fired on the first enemy ground troops spotted by aircraft operating from Chu Lai. From 6 to 16 June, the remainder of the squadron's 20 jets arrived at Chu Lai. The unit was now at full strength and the tempo of operations immediately increased. A flight led by Lieutenant Colonel Stender on 23 June was commended by the U. S. Air Force's 2d Air Division for providing "the finest close air support we have ever seen."[1] Five days later, eight Tomcat A-4s provided landing zone preparation and close air support for the 4th Marines in the first Marine Corps combat helicopterborne assault in Vietnam. By the end of the month, the Tomcats had flown 547 flights and were credited with destroying or damaging 398 structures, killing 31 enemy, and destroying a jungle supply dump and a rice storage area.

While the pilots were involved with flight operations, the ground personnel were busy unloading the remainder of the squadron's supplies which were arriving by Marine KC-130s. By 30 June 1965, the last load was received completing the movement of 204 officers and men and 269 tons of equipment. Additionally, the squadron continued to prepare defensive positions and assisted in the construction of flight line revetments.

Although the Skyhawks were committed from Saigon to the 17th parallel, the dividing line between North Vietnam and the Republic of South Vietnam, most of the missions were flown in support of ground operations along the coastal strip in northern RVN, especially in the vicinity of Chu Lai where the enemy was intent upon dislodging the Marines from their new airfield. On the night of 6 July, the MAG-12 jets joined forces and, with the aid of flares, attacked Viet Cong who were firing on Marines from a stronghold near Quang Ngai. By the time the smoke cleared, more than 100 buildings were destroyed, 97 others were damaged, and the VC were forced to seek refuge in the hills to the west. Two days later, the squadron was called on to assist the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. The Marines had pushed the enemy onto a 4- by 6-mile peninsula, 10 miles southeast of the airfield. The jets added the necessary punch to break the enemy's resistance and before the day ended, the

Marines captured 47 VC and killed 11 others. However, the enemy was as determined as the Marines and the next day the 3d Marines again required support from the Tomcats. Moments after takeoff, the jets dived on enemy positions barely 5 miles south of the Chu Lai perimeter. Every off-duty Marine ran to the beach to watch the action. Ordnancemen, who had armed the jets shortly before, watched excitedly as clouds mushroomed from the targets. When it was over there was no doubt the VC would not be coming any closer for awhile.

Amidst the endless takeoffs and landings during July, runway repair and camp construction continued using the limited manpower and supplies that were available. Dual aircraft revetments were completed using 55-gallon drums filled with sand. On 14 July, MAG-11 with its McDonnell F-4 Phantom fighter-attack squadrons, VMFA-513 and -542, joined the expanding 1st MAW at Chu Lai.

In August, Tomcat pilots flew 591 sorties and accumulated 897 hours in the air on interdiction, convoy escort, landing zone preparation, and close air support missions in both I and II Corps. Throughout the month, VMA-311 joined other A-4 and F-4 squadrons for Operation Starlite just south of Chu Lai. The Skyhawks flew like the Corsairs did at Peleliu, streaking down the runway with a full load and expending it almost before their wheels had been raised. Every time the assaulting Marines ran into a fortified position or a network of caves, there were Phantoms or Skyhawks overhead waiting for a call. Until the operation ended, Marine air was no further away than a radio call.

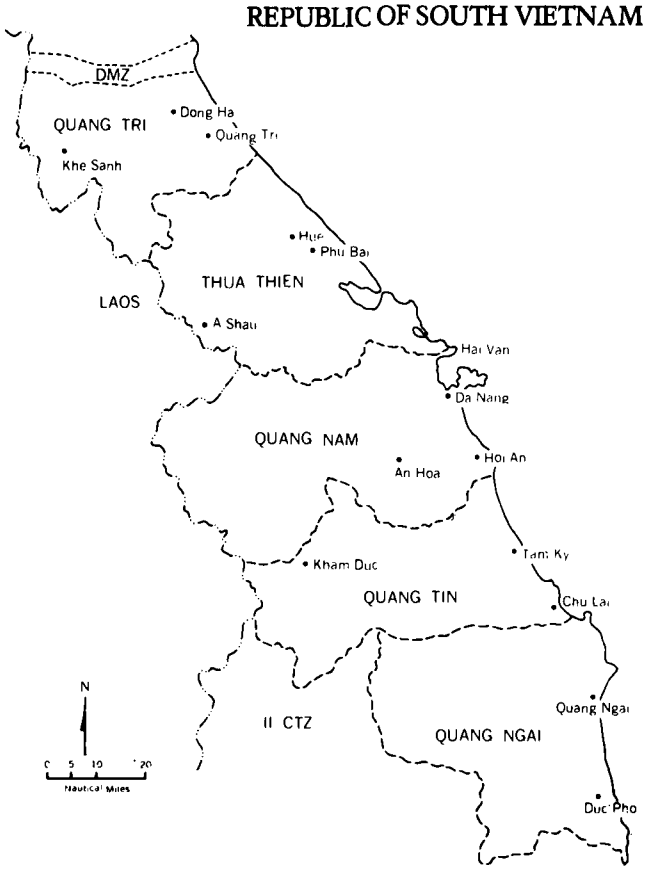
On 25 August, disaster was narrowly avoided when the pilot flying wing on First Lieutenant Roy J. Stocking, Jr., released a Mark-82, 500-pound bomb as the flight was in a turn. The bomb fell through Lieutenant Stocking's right wing, but fortunately had not traveled far enough to arm. The pilot was able to keep the aircraft under control and land safely at Chu Lai.

September 1965 can be summed up in three words; heat, sand, and rain. To combat the elements, the group built an aluminum hangar in which the Skyhawks could undergo maintenance. The rains, a prelude to the northwest monsoon, required the pilots to fly using instrument flight rules for takeoffs and landings and specialized radar once airborne. It did not take the enemy long to realize that poor weather was no deterrent to the presence of the Tomcats' A-4s.

In mid-September, VMA-311 was called on to support U.S. Marines and units of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) involved in Operation Piranha. Hours before the ground forces began their attack, the men of 311 began preparing the jets in the early morning darkness. By dawn the Skyhawks were lifting off the runway and Operation Piranha was underway. The efforts of the squadron were rewarded by reports that 198 VC had been killed in action. During the operation, adverse weather required close coordination with helicopter flights and the assistance of Air Support Radar Teams (ASRT) which guided the jets to unseen targets.

In October and November 1965, the 29 officers and 171 enlisted men were subjected to almost constant rain. Besides bringing discomfort, the rains caused extensive erosion of the northern 3,500 feet of runway leaving less than 4,500 feet usable. For the pilots, it was back to JATO and arrested landings until repairs could be made. Heavy rains and high winds grounded the A-4s for 6 days in November, and with 21 inches of rain which fell during the last 10 days of the month, there was not a dry Marine in the area. Still, the Skyhawks supported the ground operations with landing zone preparation, helicopter escort, and close air support missions.

I CORPS TACTICAL ZONE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM



USMC Photo A332593

The newer wood and corrugated metal quarters, left, were much cooler than the hot tents, right, that kept blowing down in strong winds. These were the typical quarters at Chu Lai.

Under the cover of darkness and rain shortly after midnight on 28 October, a Viet Cong unit breeched the perimeter and attacked the airfield. Although most of the enemy were killed by the group guard and the crash crew, two squadron aircraft were destroyed and six were damaged.[2] On 4 November, the VC paid another visit to the Chu Lai residents, but this time they were detected and driven back before any damage could be done.

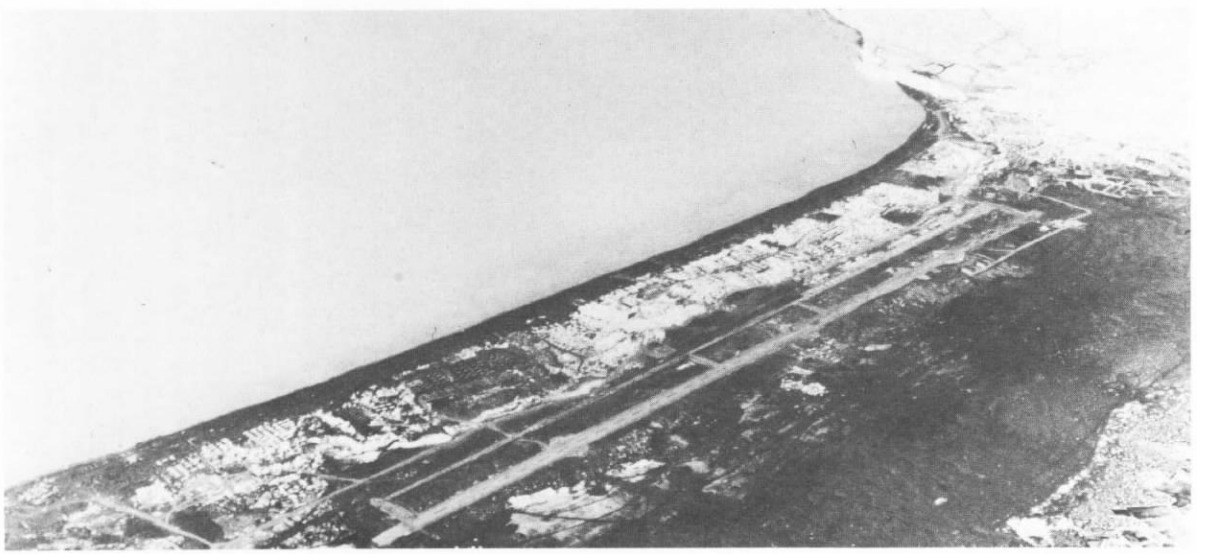
As camp construction progressed, aluminum huts were built to replace the hot tents that kept blowing down in the strong winds. Use of the full 8,000 feet of runway was restored on 9 November and for the moment the JATO bottles were put away. The squadron closed out the month standing ankle deep in mud as the traditional change of command formation was held while Lieutenant Colonel Stender relinquished command to Lieutenant Colonel Jack W. Harris.

During December, the squadron supported Marine forces involved in Operation Harvest Moon. The operation, which lasted from 8 to 19 December, kept the Tomcats busy as the enemy fought to hold their ground. On one mission against automatic weapon emplacements, First Lieutenant Thomas L. Hampton led three A-4s over the target and discovered 15 VC machineguns lined up in the underbush bordering a rice paddy. The Skyhawks went to work dropping 2 tons of bombs in 12 passes. "Beautiful, beautiful," radioed the pilot flying low cover, "the air is full of flying machinegun pieces." After the last pass, the ground unit reported that 11 of the 15 emplacements had been destroyed.[3]

A few days later, a four-plane flight led by Captain William F. Mullen was directed to an area 80 miles southwest of Chu Lai where a VC training school had been located. The Skyhawks made 21 passes dropping bombs, rockets, and ripping the structures with their 20mm cannons. When it was over, all 15 buildings

Lieutenant Colonel Jack W. Harris, left, the new commanding officer of VMA-311, receives help from Lieutenant Colonel Bernard J. Stender, right, the previous commanding officer, in adding his name to the squadron's sign. VMA-311 was stationed at Chu Lai, Vietnam.

USMC Photo A332592



USMC Photo A188211

An aerial view of Chu Lai airfield in the summer of 1966.

were reduced to burning rubble, and the VC had lost a valuable training site.

On 15 December 1965, VMA-311 became part of the first rotation of squadrons between RVN and Iwakuni. As the Tomcats launched from Chu Lai, VMA-223 was already en route to Vietnam from Iwakuni. The remainder of the 311 Marines boarded VMGR-152's KC-130s for the trip to Japan. The changeover went very smoothly, and MAG-12 was able to continue with normal flight operations.

While at Iwakuni, VMA-311 was assigned to MAG-13, 1st MAW(Rear). Immediately the squadron began flight operations to prepare newly joined pilots for operations in Vietnam. Training missions were designed to resemble actual combat missions. Excellent training was accomplished in January 1966 when the squadron sent eight aircraft to Cubi Point, Philippine Islands, to participate in Operation Hilltop III. The exercise included helicopter escort and close air support missions. Upon completion of the amphibious exercise, the unit began the final stages of preparation for its second tour of RVN. On 15 February the first Tomcat aircraft landed at Chu Lai as the last A-4s of VMA-214 took off for Iwakuni. Two hours later, Lieutenant Colonel Harris led the first combat flight of this tour.[4]

On 19 March 1966, while supporting Army Special Forces operations in the A Shau valley in the northwestern part of I Corps, VMA-311 lost its first pilot. While flying lead in a two-plane section, First Lieutenant Augusto M. Xavier maneuvered his flight over the steep mountains surrounding the valley. In the predawn darkness Lieutenant Xavier arrived over the target and, with the aid of flares dropped from an Air Force C-123, began a low-level bombing run on enemy positions. Receiving heavy ground fire, he kept his wingman in orbit while he made a second run, strafing the NVA with his 20mm cannons. Lieutenant Xavier never pulled out of this run and his plane crashed into the side of the mountain. For his determination in supporting the ground forces, Lieutenant Xavier was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.[5]

In mid-April, Tomcat pilots were scrambled when approximately 100 Viet Cong were spotted attempting to flee a village southwest of Quang Ngai. First Lieutenants James R. Hartman and George I. Felt, Jr., were circling overhead minutes later, waiting for the ground controller to mark the target. After the pilots made several passes dropping napalm and strafing with 20mm cannons, the ground forces began their sweep. Many of the VC had fled to the hills, but 15 dead enemy soldiers and 10 completely destroyed structures remained as a testimony to the effectiveness of the A-4s.

In July the squadron accumulated 726 combat sorties and 970 flight hours. With several pilots on rest and recuperation (R&R) leave, jungle escape and survival training at Cubi Point, water survival training at Numazu, Japan, and the nuclear weapons refresher course at Iwakuni, the squadron relied heavily on the A-4 pilots in wing and group staff

billets to fill in where necessary on the flight schedule.

Operation Hastings, the biggest Marine Corps operation in Vietnam to date, began on 15 July 1966 in the steaming highlands of Quang Tri near the city of Dong Ha. The U. S. Marine and ARVN forces were no longer chasing a small group of elusive VC, but were now facing the *324th North Vietnamese Army Division*. Helicopters from MAGs-16 and -36 carried troops into the battle area as Skyhawks and Phantoms continually orbited overhead. By the second week in August, the air-ground team had killed over 700 of the enemy.

On 10 August, Captain Roy N. Emanuel flew the squadron's 7,000th combat mission and 2 weeks later, First Lieutenant Lewis J. Wehner brought the total number of combat flight hours to 10,000 as VMA-311 set the pace for the jet squadrons. The accumulation of flight statistics also means exposure for those who fly the missions. This fact was realized on 6 September when the squadron lost another pilot. While flying a bombing mission 175 miles south of Chu Lai, First Lieutenant Thomas H. Hawking was pulling out of a bombing run when his aircraft struck some trees and he was forced to eject. Lieutenant Hawking landed safely and before long an Army UH-1E was lowering a rope to the downed pilot. With the rope supposedly securing the pilot, the helicopter began its assent. When the helicopter was about 1,000 feet in the air, Lieutenant Hawking fell and was killed.

In October 1966 the squadron flew a total of 696 flight hours with an average of 17 planes and 21 pilots on hand. With the unit's strength down to 153 enlisted men, the daily aircraft availability dropped to 64 percent. Fortunately, in November a number of new maintenance men joined the squadron, and by the end of the month the aircraft availability increased to a more acceptable 72 percent. By December 167 enlisted men were on board and the aircraft availability was a constant 75 percent.

As the majority of the squadron gathered to welcome in the new year, five Tomcat pilots assembled, not to celebrate the advent of 1967, but to congratulate each other on reaching the 200 mission mark. These pilots were Captains William F. Schwab, Bruce C. Miller, Anthony J. McCarthy, Leo F. Haller, and David Y. Healy.

January 1967 was a busy month for VMA-311 as it flew the 19 aircraft on hand for a total of 914 hours. Major Kevin M. Johnston and Captain Haller

USMC Photo A332605

Lieutenant Colonel Eugene Lichtenwalter, left, commanding officer of VMA-311, talks to First Lieutenant Donald J. Beary, a pilot in VMA-311.

teamed up on 20 January to record the unit's 10,000th combat sortie. In January alone the Tomcats blasted the enemy with 676 tons of ordnance including 3,393 bombs, 190 napalm pods, and 12,557 rounds of 20mm ammunition.

From 29 January through 1 February, MAG-12, now consisting of VMAs -121, -211, -214, and -311, flew day and night supporting several U. S., ARVN, and ROK operations in I Corps. From 1 February, when Lieutenant Colonel Roger A. Morris, the commanding officer since 6 December 1966, flew his 7,000th career flight hour in support of Operation De Soto, to the end of the month, the Tomcats accumulated 1,004 flight hours. On the 4th, Captain McCarthy became the leader in MAG-12 for individual combat sorties with 271. The record breaking sorties came in support of Operation De Soto when a unit of the 1st Marine Division requested an air strike on an enemy position which was preventing the Marines from advancing. After eight passes on the target, the Marines again were able to move forward.

Operation De Soto also gave Major Eugene Lichtenwalter and his wingman, Captain Charles T. Mullin, a chance to eliminate a VC stronghold about 35 miles south of Chu Lai. Tne 2 Skyhawk pilots made 9 runs on the target, killing 15 VC, destroying 22 structures, and causing a "secondary explosion which sent sparks and white smoke in every direction."[6]

The squadron came close to losing another plane and perhaps a pilot when First Lieutenant Richard N. Bloomberg's A-4 was hit by antiaircraft fire during a

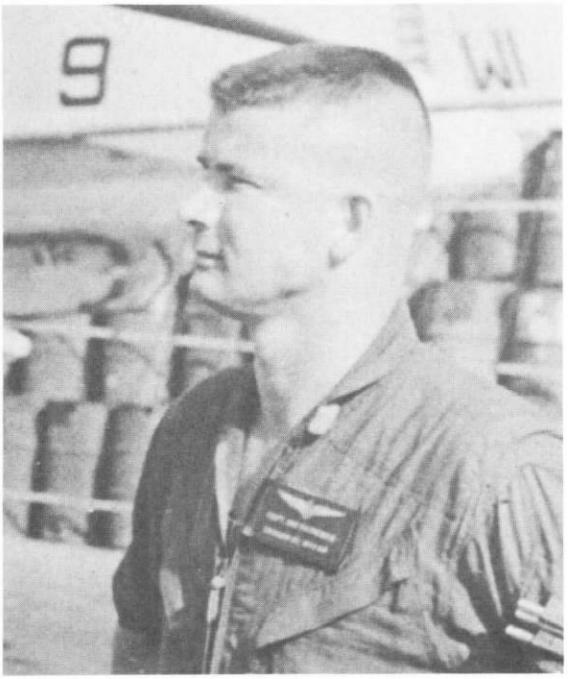
strike north of Da Nang on 4 February. With his instruments out and an overheating engine, the pilot headed for Da Nang. On final approach Lieutenant Bloomberg cut off his engine in order to prevent it from possibly exploding and made a perfect "dead stick" landing.

By the end of February the squadron had logged more than 11,000 combat sorties and the Tomcats were now ready for a well-earned rest. On 1 March VMA-311 departed for Iwakuni as VMA-223 arrived at Chu Lai to take its place. Until 3 June 1967, the squadron was attached to MAG-15, 1st MAW(Rear) in Iwakuni. During this period, the training of new pilots and ground personnel was the primary mission. Deployments to Cubi Point and Naha provided excellent training as the pilots gained experience in aerial refueling and made maximum use of the range facilities available. On 4 June, the Tomcats were back at Chu Lai, and 3 days later Major Lichtenwalter, previously the squadron executive officer, became the commanding officer relieving Lieutenant Colonel Roger A. Morris.

Elements of the 1st and 3d Battalion, 7th Marines were helilifted into an area northwest of An Hoa on 14 June for the beginning of Operation Arizona. Skyhawks and Phantoms provided landing zone preparation fire and helicopter escort. Once the troops were on ground, VMA-311 flew close air support destroying pockets of resistance in front of the advancing Marines.

Enemy antiaircraft guns on the northern side of the DMZ were a constant threat to aircraft operating in the northern I Corps area. On 23 June 1967, Captain Munson R. "Sid" Snedeker led a section of A-4s against these emplacements which previously had been bombed only from high altitudes due to the intense ground fire. Controlled by an airborne observer in a Marine O-1C plane, Captain Snedeker and his wingman rolled in low to remain under the flak and dropped all their bombs on one pass. The result was 20 structures destroyed and 10 others damaged. Although the 37mm guns were not completely silenced, this mission led the way for a 34-plane strike the following day which put the remaining guns out of commission and completely destroyed the enemy installation.

July was a busy month for the squadron as it accumulated more than 1,000 sorties in 1,362 flight hours while delivering 1,474 tons of ordnance against enemy targets. However, the heavy schedule of flight operations was taking its toll in aircraft engines and



USMC Photo A332604

Captain Munson R. "Sid" Snedeker watches flight operations after completing a mission against antiaircraft guns north of the DMZ.

ground support equipment. During the month, 15 engines were sent to H&MS-12 for repair. Difficulties were also experienced with aircraft starting units and hydraulic test stands, which seemed to be continually in need of replacement parts or repair. Nevertheless flight operations continued.

While flying near the DMZ on 6 July, Major Ralph E. Brubaker's A-4 was hit by a surface-to-air missile. Unable to control the plane, he was forced to eject. Major Brubaker landed in a small field and suffered a dislocated knee. He crawled into a nearby bomb crater and spent the night. At dawn he used his survival radio and contacted a search aircraft in the area and a short time later an Air Force helicopter was overhead. While taking fire, the helicopter landed and with help of a crewman, Major Brubaker got on board. Thirty minutes later the helicopter, which had taken four hits, arrived at Da Nang with a very relieved Tomcat pilot.

For Captains William E. Loftus and John V. Wilke, the area around the DMZ became an attack pilot's dream. On 2 July 1967 the pilots were on the alert pad when Marines at Con Thien reported that North Vietnam troops were attacking in close formation. Captain Loftus located the enemy and the

USMC Photo A332603

Here Captain Robert C. Korman and Major Gerald L. Ellis check last-minute instructions before a flight against the Communists in Vietnam. Subsequently Major Ellis' aircraft was hit and he was forced to eject. He was later picked up by a helicopter and returned to Chu Lai uninjured.

jets began making their runs. After killing 25 of the enemy, the two Tomcats turned the enemy assault into a retreat. Captain Loftus returned to Chu Lai with a hit in one wing and his 150th mission completed.

In August the average aircraft availability fell to 53 percent due to the number of planes requiring maintenance and shortages in replacement parts. By September the situation improved and, with a 71 percent availability, the squadron flew 1,056 hours.

Making good use of the increased aircraft availability, Captain Loftus and First Lieutenant James A. Schmalz, Jr., destroyed 50 North Vietnamese rocket positions 10 miles north of Dong Ha shortly after dark on 4 September. With the assistance of an Air Force airborne controller, the pilots began dropping 500- and 250-pound bombs. Enemy .50 caliber fire soon forced the Air Force observation plane away from the target, but the Tomcats continued the mission using the .50 caliber tracer rounds and muzzle flashes to locate the enemy. After expending their bombs, the pilots sprayed the area with their 20mm cannons. Secondary explosions and fires broke out everywhere, and after 14 minutes the enemy guns and rocket positions were destroyed.

Earlier that same day, an enemy surface-to-air missile (SAM) site was located 25 miles south of the North Vietnamese city of Dong Hoi. Major James A. Curtis and Captain Richard E. Jacobs arrived over the target and on the first pass a 500-pound bomb found its mark, igniting one of the SAMs. Five secondary explosions followed, and realizing no further runs were necessary, the Skyhawks returned to base.

Another squadron aircraft was lost on 27 September when Major Gerald L. Ellis' jet was hit by ground fire during a bombing run. The pilot managed to continue on his run until he released his ordnance at 3,500 feet, then pulled out and ejected. Major Ellis was picked up by a helicopter and returned to Chu Lai uninjured.

During October, of the 20 aircraft allowed the unit, only 14 were on hand. Required maintenance and delays in receiving replacement parts severely affected the average aircraft availability. The squadron commander stated: "Two aircraft must remain out of commission at all times to support through cannibalization* the remaining aircraft. This month 67 items were cannibalized."[7]

The Marine base at Khe Sanh became a center of attention in January 1968 for both ground and aviation units when the combat base came under attack from elements of the *325C NVA Division* and *304th NVA Division*. The enemy was strongly reinforced with artillery, tank, and rocket units. To support the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh, helicopters, air transports, and jet fighter and attack aircraft were constantly flying among the anitaircraft fire which was intense, accurate, and effective. Many helicopters were hit, transports destroyed, and attack/fighter aircraft shot down. The Tomcats lost two planes, but since the pilots were safely recovered, they considered themselves lucky.[9] The first loss occurred on 21 January when Captain Bobby G. Downing was hit near the besieged base and was

*Cannibalize—to remove serviceable parts from one item of equipment in order to install them on another piece of equipment.

forced to abandon his A-4. While his wingman attempted to ward off the advancing enemy, a UH-1E helicopter picked up the downed pilot 10 minutes after he ejected.[10]

Two days later another plane was lost over the same area. Captain Moyers S. Shore, II, in his *The Battle for Khe Sanh*, states:

> During one close air support mission, an A-4 flown by Major William E. Loftus of VMA-311 received heavy battle damage and the pilot realized he could not make it to the coast. Not wanting to end up in "Indian Country," he nursed his crippled Skyhawk toward Khe Sanh and ejected right over the base. As the smoking A-4 knifed into the lush jungle growth and erupted in a brilliant orange fireball, Major Loftus floated down and landed in an outer ring of barbed wire just outside of Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines perimeter. Lieutenant Dillon, the 2d Platoon commander, took several men out and helped extricate the major who had become helplessly entangled in his parachute shroud lines and the barbed wire. After being freed, Major Loftus grinned and told the Lieutenant "If you weren't so damn ugly, I'd kiss you." After a quick medical check-up, the major climbed aboard a helicopter and returned to his squadron at Chu Lai for another plane and another day.[11]

Beginning with the Vietnamese Tet holiday, the lunar New Year, which fell on 29 January 1968, the enemy changed his strategy and was no longer the elusive small unit which only hit and ran. Instead, the Communists used the holiday truce to resupply units and to move into positions for major assaults. Meanwhile, the U.S. and ARVN forces were preoccupied with the impending confrontation near the DMZ leaving the enemy the opportunity to launch a large-scale offensive against the roads, the airfields, and the cities. Of all these, the enemy achieved his greatest measure of surprise and success in the cities.[12]

On 31 January, the enemy turned his attention to Chu Lai. During the early morning hours, rockets began hitting the base damaging four of the squadron's jets and wounding two men, Sergeant John S. Narbut and Corporal Thomas B. Manning. The squadron area did not take any direct hits, but was subjected to heavy fragmentation and blast effect caused by an explosion which destroyed a major portion of the bomb dump.

On 25 February 1968, Major Darold L. Guttormson and Captain Norman E. Pridgen, Jr., were flying close air support in the Khe Sanh area when both aircraft were hit by ground fire. Both planes returned safely to Chu Lai and upon examination of the A-4s, the pilots discovered .30 caliber rounds lodged in their aircraft.

If the enemy had any intentions of rocketing Chu Lai in February, Captains Robert T. Allen and Robert C. Trumpfheller may have prevented such an attack. On 25 February the two pilots hit a rocket site south of Chu Lai with 250-pound bombs causing several secondary explosions and sending a 100-foot cloud of white smoke billowing from the target.

Of the many accomplishments of Marine aviation in Vietnam, the capturing of enemy troops was one task generally left to the ground forces. However, on 2 May the squadron received credit for the capture of nine NVA soldiers. When Majors John A. Herber and Thomas E. Lewis arrived over a target 13 miles northwest of Hue, the target was obscured by a low overcast so the pilots orbited until the ground forces could mark the target with smoke. When the A-4s dropped under the clouds ready to begin their runs, the pilots saw enemy troops with their hands up moving towards the Marine positions. Once the enemy were in the hands of the Marines, the A-4s began their bombing runs. As Major Herber stated: "Those who decided to stay more than likely wished they had surrendered." By the time the Skyhawks left the target, the enemy was no longer an obstacle to the Marines.

From 5 to 8 May, VMA-311 gave the enemy throughout I Corps a close look at its Skyhawks as the squadron flew a record 240 alert sorties during the 4-day period. During daylight hours the pilots concentrated on visual bombing attacks. During the hours of darkness they continually harassed the enemy with bombing attacks controlled by either the TPQ-10 radar or visually by pilots under an umbrella of aircraft-dispensed flares.

Scrambled to support the 26th Marines near Khe Sanh, First Lieutenant William E. Holland delivered an attack against an NVA position on a ridgeline which literally rearranged the geography in northern I Corps. Systematically dropping his bombs under the guidance of an air controller, Lieutenant Holland made two passes right on target. The controller radioed the pilot: "You're getting some secondary explosions down there. Five...10...30...50... The whole damn hill just blew up!" A sweep of the area revealed that the pilot had hit an 82mm mortar ammunition storage area.[13]

By the end of May, the Tomcats had the distinction of leading Marine jet squadrons in total combat sorties with 20,000. VMA-311 also led in individual missions flown with Captain Peter A. Krueger, a second tour pilot, who recently had flown his 500th combat mission.

USMC Photo A188211

An aerial view of the expanded facilities at Chu Lai in August of 1968.

Aircraft availability during the June and July 1968, averaged 87 percent with 19 aircraft on hand. The squadron was now affected by a lack of assigned pilots and had to rely on staff officers to assist the 17 available squadron pilots. In June, 39 staff officers flew 34 percent of the squadron sorties while the Tomcats continued flying over 1,000 hours a month. In July the Skyhawk unit totaled 1,188 sorties in 1,319 flight hours and unleashed 1,680 tons of ordnance in support of ground operations.

One place the pilots could always count on finding enemy action was in the A Shau Valley, and on 16 August Major Donald S. Carr found this especially true. While pulling out from a run on target, his jet was hit in the tail section leaving a huge gaping hole just under the horizonal stabilizer. With both hands on the stick, Major Carr maintained control of the jet until a fire developed in the A-4. The pilot safely ejected over Hue and was immediately picked up by a helicopter in the area.

In September 1968, the squadron collected its 25,000th combat sortie. In the 1st MAW command chronology, VMA-311 was referred to as the "undisputed pace-setter and has set what is believed to be a record number of combat sorties for any fixed wing squadron in a single conflict or war."[14]

The civic action program in RVN gave the Tomcats the opportunity to meet some of the Vietnamese people and to help some of the less fortunate. The program also gave the Vietnamese the opportunity to see the Marines in a noncombat role. VMA-311's civic action program brought the squadron members to Long Binh, near Chu Lai where they visited the nearly 100 families living in the hamlet. In November the Tomcats presented 63 scholarships, totaling $845, to elementary school children. The squadron also delivered 525 concrete blocks which the people used to construct a new classroom on their small school. Several needy children were given clothing, but most importantly they were given friendship. Although most of the people could not speak English, they soon came to know the name Tomcat.

The celebration of the Marine Corps birthday on 10 November 1968 came to an abrupt end the following day when Captain Phillip D. Barger was killed in action. While flying a mission against suspected NVA positions in the foothills northwest of Da Nang, Captain Barger was making his second run on a target when his plane was hit by ground fire. The pilot never pulled out of the dive and the jet exploded as it collided with the ground.

On 19 November, two A-4s apparently terrified the enemy into surrendering. The VMA-311 jets, each loaded with 3,000 pounds of imminent destruction, flew over the VC and began circling the target. As the pilots, Lieutenant Colonel Charles O. Hiett, the commanding officer, and Major William R. Smith, established their pattern and confirmed the target with Marine ground units, 30 pajama-clad troops began moving toward the Marines with their hands held high. The VC may have decided that surrendering was a better choice than being on the receiving end of the Skyhawk ordnance.

USMC Photo A332602

Captain Durwood K. Schnell after completing one of his 533 combat missions. Captain Schnell, after two tours in Vietnam, had accumulated more missions than any other Marine jet attack pilot serving in that country.

During the following month the squadron attacked rocket sites, troop concentrations, enemy fortifications, a truck park, and infiltration routes. By 31 December, the Tomcats had accumulated 28,075 combat sorties and 33,907 flight hours. The major operations and units supported in December were:

Nevada Eagle—Americal Division and the 101st Airborne Division
Taylor Common—7th Marines, 1st Marine Division
Dawson River—101st Airborne Division
Scotland II—3d Marine Division
Fayette Canyon—Americal Division
Commando Hunt—Seventh Air Force[15]*

For First Lieutenant John F. Garretson, 6 March 1969 became a day to remember. Assigned a mission west of Da Nang in support of Operation Dewey Canyon, he discovered the ground unit was Task Force Hotel, commanded by his father, Brigadier General Frank E. Garretson. When the pilot returned to Chu Lai, he learned he had just flown the Tomcats' 30,000th combat sortie.

*A Seventh Air Force operation against enemy supply and approach routes outside Vietnam.

The enemy in the vicinity of Chu Lai put VMA-311 on the receiving end of a rocket attack on 21 March. The initial attack and ensuing fire destroyed four of the jets and damaged four others. Fortunately, no personnel were seriously injured. Immediately following the attack, the Tomcats launched their remaining aircraft and were soon returning the enemy's visit.

In May the squadron was awarded MAG-12's aviation safety award for third quarter fiscal year 1969, and operations continued without mishap until 23 May. On that day First Lieutenant Peter W. Oatis was flying a mission south of Da Nang when his A-4 was hit by ground fire. The pilot managed to retain control long enough to broadcast "Mayday," then he ejected. Although Lieutenant Oatis suffered some minor injuries, he was soon back in the cockpit seeking revenge.

In June 1969 the Communists learned that even the most reinforced positions were no match for the armament of the A-4s. When U. S. Army units operating in the vicinity of Tam Ky requested an air strike, Major A. David Thompson, Jr., and Captain Charles R. Sorensen were quickly on target. The enemy positions were a complex of large, well-constructed, and well-protected concrete fortifications, some nearly 50 feet long. Between the bombs and the secondary explosions, 12 positions were destroyed, 2 damaged, and the area was left in ruins.

VMA-311 flew 707 combat sorties in August while supporting seven major ground operations. Although only nine enemy were confirmed as killed by the Tomcats, the monthly bomb damage assessment (BDA) included 227 bunkers and 128 structures destroyed. The jets also accounted for 49 secondary fires and 38 secondary explosions. Also during this month, Captain Durwood K. Schnell flew his last combat sorties. After two tours the Tomcat pilot had accumulated 533 missions, more than any other Marine jet attack pilot.

In September the squadron was selected as the recipient of the CNO's aviation safety award for fiscal year 1969. Although the squadron had its combat losses, it had recorded over 10,000 flight hours and 11,000 sorties without a noncombat accident.

Early in the month, a routine bombing mission, which knocked out an enemy position northwest of Da Nang, put VMA-311 into the spotlight again. This mission was the record-setting 35,000th combat sortie. Leading the mission was the MAG-12

commander, Colonel Thomas H. Nichols Jr., with First Lieutenant John W. Danskin flying the wingman position. For Colonel Nichols, who had been assigned to then VMF-311 in Korea, this was his last flight in Vietnam.

Although the combat requirements kept most of the Tomcats working long hours to keep the Skyhawks ready, the men continued to support the civic action program. In October the squadron presented $1,200 collected from the unit to the Vietnamese children's scholarship fund to assist needy children in receiving an education.

The Tomcats enjoyed a relatively quiet month in November and despite the 82 percent average aircraft availability and 19 aircraft on hand, the unit flew only 505 hours. However, 10 combat operations were supported and 22 Communists were killed by air.

Between October and December, two A-4s were lost as the result of unsuccessful takeoff aborts. On both occasions the pilots ejected and escaped serious injury.

January 1970 found the squadron enjoying a 75 percent daily aircraft availability with 20 planes on hand. In the 739 hours flown this month, the Tomcats dropped 860 tons of ordnance, killing 75 enemy troops and destroying several Communist positions.

On 12 February, after 4 years and 2 months of combat with MAG-12 in Vietnam, VMA-311 was reassigned to MAG-13. The transfer provided no relief from combat for the Tomcats since MAG-13 was also located at Chu Lai; however, with the inclusion of VMA-311, the previously all-Phantom fighter group now possessed the versatile Skyhawk.

The following month, the squadron showed the MAG-13 commander, Colonel Thomas E. Murphree, how the unit had earned its reputation. While providing air support for an emergency medical evacuation 10 miles southwest of Da Nang, Major Frederick F. Harshbarger and Captain Bruce A. Schwanda kept the enemy occupied while a helicopter slipped in and picked up the wounded Marine. Besides contributing to the saving of a life, the flight logged the squadron's 38,000th combat sortie.

Throughout April, scrambles from the alert pad brought immediate relief to embattled ground units. On one occasion a scramble in response to a call from Army's Americal Division put two A-4s, led by Captain Gordon R. Jefferson, over the target in a matter of minutes. The target was a well-contructed enemy bunker about 30 miles south of Chu Lai.

USMC Photo A422637

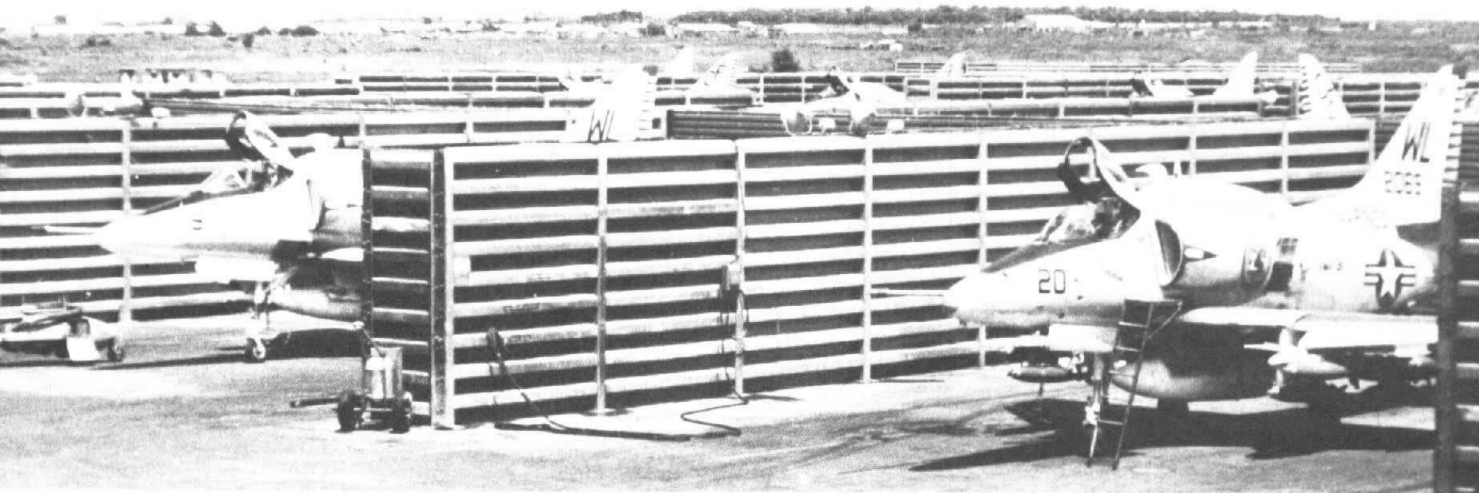
Lance Corporal William E. Lysle, left, and Lance Corporal Porter R. Tkachuk, right, mix a batch of soap to wash the dirt and grime from an A-4E Skyhawk. Both men are members of VMA-311.

Before the A-4s pulled off target, 12 bodies and a destroyed bunker were all that remained of the enemy's position.

Unfortunately, flying attack aircraft was not always a matter of dropping some bombs and receiving an impressive BDA. On 11 April, while attacking an enemy base camp about 10 miles southwest of Da Nang, First Lieutenant Jan H. Nelson was killed. His aircraft was seen diving on the target, but instead of pulling up, the jet continued down behind a ridgeline. A moment later, a large fireball appeared marking the jet's point of impact.

A week later, Major Harshbarger and First Lieutenant Robert J. Short teamed up with an Air Force observer over a valley 30 miles west of Chu Lai. After 6 passes by the 2 pilots, the aerial observer counted 22 enemy dead. Although nothing can relieve the feeling of loss for a member of the squadron, the pilots had done what they could to even the score.

The destruction which VMA-311 caused in May demonstrated that although the personnel within the squadron had changed several times over the years, the effectiveness of the Tomcats remained constant. During the month the unit destroyed 61 structures and 216 bunkers while damaging many others. A total of 5 ammunition sites and 8 antiaircraft



USMC Photo A422975

VMA-311 Skyhawks parked in revetments on Da Nang airfield. The Tomcats moved from Chu Lai to Da Nang in July 1970.

positions were also destroyed, and 115 enemy were killed by air. On 30 May, as the squadron provided air support for the 101st Airborne Division, the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur R. Hickle, flew the 40,000th combat sortie and his last mission before being relieved by Lieutenant Colonel James M. Bannan. Lieutenant Colonel Hickle had dropped the first Marine bomb over Vietnam in April 1965 and now, after three tours and over 350 missions, was reassigned to Headquarters Marine Corps. Flying with him on the 40,000th sortie was Captain Clyde E. "Fox" Foreman who on this flight completed his 600th combat mission and became one of the top three jet pilots in the Marine Corps for individual combat missions.

What began as a routine mission for Captain Fred Palka on 7 June 1970, ended in near disaster for the Tomcat. While flying near Dak To, 120 miles southwest of Chu Lai in II Corps, his aircraft was hit by ground fire. Captain Palka stated:

> I heard a cracking noise, then the plane became uncontrollable. I remember flying upside down and, by some miracle, the plane straightened out and I bailed out as soon as I saw sky. I spent nearly 40 minutes on the ground in the middle of a firefight before an Army helicopter picked me up.[16]

The pilot suffered minor injuries and was brought to Pleiku. The next day he returned to Chu Lai where he was happily greeted by other Tomcats.

For a six-man reconnaissance team, surrounded by North Vietnamese Army troops, First Lieutenant James E. Barksdale became the only man who stood between them and possible death. On 24 June, with darkness approaching, a low overcast, and enemy troops within 75 meters of the Marines, Lieutenant Barksdale began making extremely accurate ordnance deliveries while receiving intense enemy ground fire. As the pilot made his last pass, Marine helicopters followed him into the zone. As darkness enveloped the hills of Quang Nam, the helicopters, with the A-4 escorting, lifted the reconnaissance Marines to safety. For his actions, Lieutenant Barksdale was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

In July, VMA-311 personnel again packed their seabags and squadron equipment. This time the unit was preparing for a move to Da Nang Air Base where it would join Colonel Albert C. Pommerenk's MAG-11. Because of the planned reduction in 1st MAW forces, several units left Vietnam and preparations were made to turn Chu Lai over to the U. S. Army. On 22 July an advance party headed by Major David Y. Healy departed Chu Lai for Da Nang. It immediately began preparing living and working spaces for the squadron, which started arriving 4 days later. The unit relocated in increments in order to continue with normal flight operations. Within a week the entire squadron was operating from Da Nang. Despite the additional work required by the move, the ordnancemen loaded 1,082 tons of explosives on the A-4s, and the 50,000th combat hour was logged during the month.

The weather was excellent during August and the squadron did most of its flying without the use of external fuel tanks. This enabled the Skyhawks to carry more payload and perform the close air support mission with greater effectiveness. Of the 553 missions flown this month, 264 were close air support, 180 direct air support, 38 radar-controlled bombing, and 42 were landing zone preparations. Major units supported during the month included the 1st Marine Division; the 1st and 3d ARVN Divisions, Republic of Korea Marine Corps; and the

USMC Photo A422278

Three A-4E Skyhawks of VMA-311 and an A-6A Intruder of VMA(AW)-533 head for a bombing mission in South Vietnam. During inclement weather the A-4s would fly wing on the Intruder, which was equipped with special radar, and "buddy bombing" was born.

U.S. Army's 1st Brigade of the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division, 101st Airborne Division, and Americal Division.

During this period, the squadron arranged for several pilots to fly with sister squadrons in the group and with the MAG-16 helicopter squadrons. By doing this the Tomcat pilots were given a better picture of the entire air war. The attack pilots became aware of some of the problems associated with the fighters and especially aware of the "tree top" war of the helicopter community.

September 1970 was a poor month for VMA-311. Two pilots and their aircraft were lost due to enemy action. The first loss occurred on 1 September, 32 miles west of Phu Bai, when a section of two A-4s were scrambled to support units of the 1st ARVN Division. An airborne forward air controller observed the lead pilot, First Lieutenant John D. Lawson, roll in for the first 10-degree napalm delivery. No ordnance was dropped and as the plane pulled out it burst into flames and crashed into the hills near the target.[17] On 11 September First Lieutenant Bernard H. Plassmeyer was killed while attacking a target 30 miles southwest of Phu Bai. Scrambled at night to support the 101st Airborne Division, two A-4s arrived over the target and commenced their runs. The flight leader finished his pass and watched as Lieutenant Plassmeyer went into his dive. "As the lieutenant was passing approximately 1,500 feet the leader saw some 'sparks' and then a long trail of flame impact in the target area."[18]

During the month of October, 328 sorties were canceled due to heavy rains and two typhoons which hit the Da Nang area. During one of the rare breaks in the weather, First Lieutenant Steven R. Sanford was airborne supporting elements of the 1st Marines in the Que Son mountains. Numerous fortified bunkers were hindering the Marines' advance, but after a few well-placed bombs the bunkers exploded, the enemy ran into the thick underbush, and five dead VC were left behind. Two days later, Lieutenant Sanford was in the air again, this time 7 miles west of Da Nang where he was guided to a target by First Lieutenant Robert E. Scar, a former Tomcat now serving a tour as a forward air controller. The target was enemy moving along an infiltration route. After two passes on the target, all movement along the route ceased.

In order to continue A-4 operations during the more inclement weather, the squadron began "buddy bombing" flights. This entailed an A-4 flying on the wing of a Grumman A-6A Intruder, equipped with navigation and bombing equipment designed to allow the pilot to fly to a location and strike a target not in visual contact. During October the squadron flew 11 such missions with VMA(AW)-225, and in November 1970, 163 of these missions were flown throughout the northern provinces of RVN.

The majority of close and direct air support missions during February and March 1971 were in support of ARVN forces moving west from Khe Sanh into Laos on Operation Lam Son 719. The ground units met stiff resistance from well-equipped NVA forces. On 27 February, the Tomcats added their support and were credited with three enemy tanks destroyed. On 3 March another five tanks were destroyed. By the end of March the squadron had flown 450 missions in support of Lam Son 719, and had a BDA that included 445 secondary explosions, 181 secondary fires, and 725 meters of road/trail cut.

In May the Marines in Vietnam began the final phase of redeployment. For VMA-311, the last mission came on 7 May. Five days later the 21 squadron Skyhawks left Da Nang to rejoin MAG-12 at MCAS Iwakuni, and on the 27th the remainder of the squadron arrived in Japan. Easily reverting to a peacetime posture, the veteran squadron of 47,663 combat sorties immediately began training flights to maintain pilot proficiency.

From July through October 1971, VMA-311 logged 1,906 flight hours which included 358 syllabus hours. Inclement weather and the lack of accessible target areas restricted the unit's training program. On 29 October, the Tomcats deployed to Naha Air Base, Okinawa, where until 15 January 1972, the pilots and ordnance personnel underwent accelerated weapons training. A portion of this training which included tactical air control and close air support was conducted with Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) 6.

On 8 December, the Tomcats participated in a weapons exercise designated Operation Banzai. The exercise encompassed all phases of conventional air-to-ground delivery, day and night JATO, and day and night aerial refueling.

In order to take advantage of the training areas on Okinawa, on 19 April 1972, the squadron constituted a six-plane detachment at Naha with plans to rotate the crews in order to afford all Tomcats the opportunity to train on the island.

As part of the American effort to reinforce South Vietnam against the all-out Easter offensive of the NVA, Colonel Dean C. Macho's MAG-12 was alerted on 12 May to move with two of its A-4 squadrons, VMAs -211 and -311, to Bien Hoa Airbase 15 miles northeast of Saigon. The move to Bien Hoa began on 16 May. Sixteen VMA-311 Skyhawks departed Iwakuni and Naha and at 0745 on 17 May. the first flight landed in RVN. The following day the remainder of the squadron arrived by KC-130s.[19] MAG-12 operations began on 19 May as jets hit targets throughout the southern half of RVN and along the Cambodian border. MAG-15, flying out of Da Nang, concentrated on the northern half of the country and along the Laotian border. From the 19th, when the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kevin M. Johnston, flew the first mission, to the end of the month, the Tomcats logged another 203 combat sorties to add to their previous total.

On 11 June 1972, the Tomcats combined their efforts for another maximum support day while responding to air requests from several ARVN units operating in Bien Hoa Province. For $12^1/_2$ hours beginning at dawn, squadron A-4s were continually taking off, arming, and refueling until 40 sorties were completed and 72.9 tons of explosives expended. In continuation of their support of ARVN forces, the unit flew 737 combat sorties in 921 hours, and were credited with killing 134 enemy and destroying 156 bunkers and 14 trucks in July.

USMC Photo A188211

Marine Chief Warrant Officer Thomas C. Van Over, veteran of Nicaragua, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam leaves for another duty assignment after 40 years of military service. Van Over had served as maintenance control officer of VMA-311 based at Chu Lai, Vietnam.

The base at Bien Hoa received rocket attacks on the first and last days of August. During the first attack Sergeant Roger E. Slayden, Corporal Welton L. Black, Corporal Earl J. Pittman III, and Lance Corporal John J. McCracken were wounded and three squadron aircraft were damaged; however, all A-4s were back in commission by the following day. The attack on the 31st caused no damage to the aircraft or the Tomcats' area. On 29 August, First Lieutenant Charles G. Reed logged the 50,000th combat sortie, a goal which the Tomcats felt had eluded them when they left Da Nang in May 1971.

While the pilots were continuing the air war, the men on the ground were busy fighting the violent monsoon rains which by 3 September had flooded the unit's spaces with $10^1/_2$ inches of water. The discomfort caused by the rains, soon seemed insignificant compared to the holocaust which occurred on 10 September when a major portion of the

Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) ordnance dump exploded sending a mushroom cloud 6,000 feet into the air and bomb fragments over the entire base. More than 100 VNAF planes were destroyed and damaged, but luckily the VMA-311 jets escaped damage.

The month of October was one of business as usual for the Tomcats and the normal pace of 26 sorties per day was maintained. Two aircraft received substantial damage in two separate accidents during the month. On the 16th, a flare dispenser caught fire on one A-4 and on the 19th an aircraft loaded with eight 500-pound bombs caught fire in the dearming area. Fortunately, no major injuries resulted from the accidents.

On the morning of 22 October, the enemy hit the airbase with 56 rounds of 122mm rocket fire. Again no squadron personnel were injured nor were any planes damaged. The month ended with a visit from Colonel Macho who flew his 100th combat mission with the Tomcats.

On 16 November, a nine-man advance party departed for Iwakuni in anticipation of the forthcoming retrograde from RVN. The remainder of the squadron joined others from the group in preparing for their departure by saying goodby to their Vietnamese friends in the nearby orphanage. The children were given a party at the base mess hall and the orphanage was presented with $1,000 collected from members of the group.

On 29 January 1973, MAG-12 (Forward), the last American combat aviation unit in Vietnam, began relocating to MCAS Iwakuni. After 54,625 combat sorties, the war was over for VMA-311.

Conclusion

The squadron spent the first month in Japan refamiliarizing pilots with the local flying area and enjoying a well-earned rest. On 9 March the squadron deployed to Naha to fulfill the requirements for special weapons requalification. After returning to Japan in April, the Tomcats began utilizing training areas in Korea. This gave them the much-needed aerial gunnery and bombing ranges they required, as well as providing low-level navigation routes. The unit also began extensive training using the electronic countermeasures equipment in the aircraft.

Four-plane detachments at Cubi Point and Naha, on 28 April and 13 May respectively, provided excellent training for the pilots in close air support as they flew simulated missions for units of the 3d Marine Division. During the last week in April, VMA-311, the primary U. S. participant in Operation Commando Jade, flew eight A-4s to South Korea to test the Korean early warning and ground control intercept radar. Through maximum use of their ECM equipment and low-level terrain masking, the Skyhawks contributed greatly to the regional air defense posture while gaining valuable experience in tactical doctrine.

In July VMA-311 deployed to Naha for air-to-air gunnery practice and conventional ordnance delivery. The training objectives were successfully completed despite having to evacuate the aircraft from Okinawa for a week due to Typhoon Billie. This was the first of seven typhoons which interrupted squadron operations before Thanksgiving.[1]

Lieutenant Colonel John H. Miller, who assumed command on Friday the 13th of July, describes the events of the following year:

> The Tomcats deployed to Cubi Point on 21 September for the specific purposes of participating in an amphibious operation on Mindoro and carrier qualifications on board the USS *Hancock* (CVA 19). At the completion of the amphibious operation, the *Hancock* deployed to the Indian Ocean so special and conventional weapons delivery training was conducted awaiting the availability of a carrier deck. Radar controlled bombing was conducted to assist in training controllers of a deployed Air Support Radar Team. The squadron weathered the passage of four typhoons through the Philippines, two forcing evacuation of the aircraft. When it was determined a carrier deck would not become available, the squadron returned to Iwakuni. With a dearth of training ordnance, no live ordnance, aircraft availability at an all-time low (as was morale), and no opportunity to go aboard ship after engaging sporadically in FMLP since late July, the deployment could hardly be considered a success.[2]

Two deployments to Naha, 11 February to 19 March and again from 3 May to mid-June, highlighted the squadron's activities for the first 7 months of 1974. Of this period Colonel Miller comments:

> May was particularly significant in terms of training accomplishments. Through multimission sortie scheduling (low-level navigation in sections, rendezvous of two or more sections for air-to-air defensive tactics, interdiction strike mission approaches to the target, culminating in air-to-ground weapons delivery practice—all combined on each sortie) the squadron's 12 A-4Es were flown on 430 sorties for 818 hours. This was the highest training achievement in MAG-12 for the past year.[3]

On 5 June 1974, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph K. Park relieved Lieutenant Colonel Miller as com-

USMC Photo A422813

A flight of A-4Es from VMA-311 flying in formation.

manding officer with the singular mission of disbanding the squadron in MAG-12. VMA-311 was to be transferred by records only to make room for the first Hawker Siddeley AV-8A Harrier squadron to deploy to the Far East. The disbanding was accomplished by turning aircraft over to the Navy for shipment to the United States and distributing personnel and equipment to other 1st MAW units. On 1 September 1974, Lieutenant Colonel Bruce B. Rutherford's VMA-324 at MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina was redesignated VMA-311, MAG-32, 2d MAW and VMA-324 was decommissioned.

With a fresh start back in CONUS, the new group of Tomcats picked up the banner and continued its proud heritage in the updated A-4M aircraft.

The first hurdle to overcome was the close scrutiny of an inspection team administering a naval technical proficiency inspection (NTPI), which would recertify the squadron in special weapons handling/loading. After a successful completion of this major inspection in September of 1974, the squadron deployed to NAF China Lake to sharpen its skills in the technical art of special weapons delivery.

At the turn of the calendar year, 1975 found VMA-311 with all of its aircraft grounded due to the problem incurred with the variable speed constant frequency (VSCF) generator. After the mechanical problems were worked out, the squadron turned to the task of preparing to carrier qualify on board the USS *John F. Kennedy* in February. Due to the limited deck space and time available not all the pilots were able to qualify at night, but all qualified in day landings and gained valuable training in carrier operations.

Upon return from the ship, the squadron passed an operations readiness inspection prior to deploying to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, to participate in Operation Rum Punch '75. After a successful air/ground team operation, the Tomcats returned to Beaufort only to face more mechanical difficulties with the VSCF generator. After the final fix was made, the banner changed hands again and a new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Dorsie D. Page, Jr., took the reins of this proud and historic squadron on 20 June 1975.

Without so much as a break in stride, the squadron

continued to prepare for an inspection by the Inspector General's team in August, which it passed in noteworthy fashion. While continuing to support the air/ground team concept, the Tomcats deployed to NAF China Lake in September 1975, and at the same time supported Operation Alkalai Canyon 76 at MCB Twentynine Palms, California. No sooner had the after-action report been completed than the Tomcats packed their gear and headed for MCAS Yuma on a conventional ordnance deployment. Upon returning from Yuma, the squadron was faced with another NTPI required for its periodic re-certification.

Through FY-75, VMA-311 flew an array of missions and tasks and compiled a safety record which was rewarded by the presentation of the FMFLant and CNO safety awards for that period.

At this time restructuring of the Marine aviation community was taking place, and VMA-311 moved from MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina, to MCAS El Toro, California, on 12 January 1976.

Immediately upon arrival at MCAS El Toro and with the majority of the squadron still en route from South Carolina, the Tomcats were supporting Exercise Forward Pass at MCB Camp Pendleton with six sorties per day as well as a detachment of 38 enlisted personnel. In March 1976 VMA-311 passed an FMFPac inspection and then started participating in Operation Palm Tree 4-76 at MCB Twentynine Palms, California. The tactics planned and flown were to be the basis of operations to come at the "Stumps" which would explore the complex problems of coordinating supporting arms in association with troops on the ground in a high threat environment.

Taking the tactics learned from Palm Tree 4-76, the Tomcats deployed to the desert base of NAS Fallon, Nevada, in June where, in corroboration with VMO-2, and the electronic warfare facilities available, they further explored all the variables of attack profiles while working in conjunction with a controlling agency for pinpoint target designation. In addition to this, all pilots were able to fly the Shrike missile against the electronic warfare range and the Sidewinder to expand the mission capabilities of the A-4 Skyhawk.

Marine Attack Squadron 311 enjoys a history and reputation unequaled by most units. The present Tomcats, who proudly fly the colors of this veteran squadron, remain prepared to serve Corps and country and add yet another chapter to their impressive history.

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Appendix A

CHRONOLOGY

1 Dec 1942	Activated as Marine Fighting Squadron 311 at MCAS, Cherry Point, N.C. and assigned to 3d. MAW.
18 Apr 1943	Moved to Parris Island, S.C.
31 Aug-8 Sep 1943	En route to MCAD Miramar, California.
8 Sep 1943	Assigned to Marine Fleet Air, West Coast.
25 Sep 1943	Air echelon sailed on board USS *Nassau* (CVE 16).
30 Sep 1943	Ground echelon sailed on board USAT *Puebla*. Assigned to MAG-31, FMF.
5 Oct 1943	Air echelon arrived Tutuila, Samoa.
6 Oct 1943	Designation changed to MAG-31, 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing.
8 Oct 1943	Air echelon arrived Wallis Island.
19 Oct 1943	Ground echelon arrived Wallis Island; disembarked next day.
26 Jan 1944	Embarked on board USS *Cape Constantine* and USS *Typhoon* (LST-1118) en route Roi, Kwajalein Atoll.
7 Feb 1944	Squadron arrived Roi Island.
23 Feb 1944	Squadron moved to Kwajalein Island in LST 477.
23 Mar 1944	First attack against enemy.
26 Mar 1944	Squadron moved from Kwajalein to Roi.
May 1944-Jan 1945	Participated in neutralization of enemy-occupied Marshall Islands.
11 Mar 1945	MAG-31 transferred from 4th MBDAW to 2d MAW.
7 Apr 1945	Flight echelon catapulted from USS *Breton* (CVE 23) and USS *Sitkoh Bay* (CVE 86) and landed at Yontan Airfield, Okinawa. Squadron shot down its first enemy aircraft.
7 Apr-26 Aug 1945	Okinawa Operations. Assigned to MAG-31, 2d MAW, Tenth Army Tactical Air Force.
22 Jul 1945	Fighter cover provided for cruiser task force close in to the East China coast. Flight overflew Wenchow area in what is believed the first flight over China by land-based Marine aircraft since 1929.
9-29 Sep 1945	Squadron in process of moving from Okinawa to Yokosuka, Japan for occupational duty.
20 Jun-3 Jul 1946	En route from Japan to U.S. on board USS *San Saba* (APA 232).
4 Jul 1946	Arrived at San Diego, California.
5-17 Jul 1946	Attached to MAG-31, Marine Air West Coast, MCAS Miramar.
17 Jul 1946	Reduced in strength to one officer and transferred to MAG-32.
26 Sep-Nov 1946	Station changed to MCAS El Toro, California. Squadron reconstituted at El Toro.
21 Apr 1947	Transferred to MAG-12, MAWC.
1 Oct 1947	Designation changed to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
15 Apr 1948	Transferred to 1st MAW as an independent squadron.
20 Jul 1948	First Marine west coast squadron to receive jet aircraft.
1 Oct 1949	Reassigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
28 Aug 1950	Transferred to MAG-15, Air FMFPac, MCAS El Toro from MAG-12.
10-13 Nov 1950	Squadron aircraft ferried to NAS San Diego for preparation for shipment overseas.
14 Nov 1950	Departed for Japan on board USS *Bairoko* (CVE 115).
29 Nov 1950	Arrived Yokosuka, Japan.
7-13 Dec 1950	Operating from Yonpo, Korea. (K-27).

8 Dec 1950	Assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
10 Dec 1950	First squadron combat mission flown and the first time Marine jet aircraft were flown in combat.
13 Dec 1950	Moved to Pusan, Korea (K-9).
25 Jan 1951	Redeployed to Itami AFB, Japan.
7 Feb 1951	Joined MAG-33, 1st MAW.
17 Feb 1951	Redeployed to Pohang, Korea (K-3) by air and LST 914.
16 Aug 1951	Furnished air support for 7th InfDiv on Hills 851 and 820. Received Letter of Commendation from MajGen C. B. Ferenbaugh, USA, on 26 Aug 1951.
28 Mar 1952	10,000th sortie flown by Captain F. J. Hubka.
27 Jul 1953	Capt W. I. Armagost flew last Marine jet mission of Korean War.
27 Apr 1955	Embarked on board USS *Princeton* (CVE 37) at Iwakuni and departed therefrom for CONUS.
31 May 1955	Squadron arrived at San Diego and departed for MCAS El Toro.
1 Jun 1955	Redesignated from MAG-33, 1st MAW to MAG-33, Air FMFPac.
15 Sep 1955	Designation changed to MAG-33, 3d MAW from MAG-33, AirFMFPac.
1 Jun 1957	Designation changed from VMF-311 to Marine Attack Squadron 311 (VMA-311).
1 Aug 1957	Transferred from MAG-33 to MAG-15.
18 Mar 1961	Squadron deployed to 1st MAW, Japan by MSTS and Marine transport aircraft.
23 Mar 1961	Transferred to MAG-12, 1st MAW, MCAF Iwakuni.
4 Apr 1961	Transferred to CAG-15, USS *Coral Sea* (CVA 43).
13 Apr 1961	Transferred to CAG-2, USS *Midway* (CVA 41).
3 Jun 1961	Transferred to MAG-12, 1st MAW, MCAS Iwakuni.
27 Mar 1962	Squadron departed NAS Cubi Point, P.I. on board Marine transport aircraft while aircraft were transported by surface.
30 Mar 1962	Transferred to MAG-15, 3d MAW, MCAS, El Toro.
30 Mar 1965	Squadron aircraft were flown from El Toro to NAS Atsugi, Japan.
1 Apr 1965	Transferred to MAG-12, 1st MAW, MCAS Iwakuni.
7 May 1965	Deployed to the Republic of Vietnam with MAG-12.
24 May 1965	Ground elements arrived at Chu Lai, RVN.
1 Jun 1965	Air elements arrived in Chu Lai.
16 Dec 1965-14 Feb 1966	Deployed to MCAS Iwakuni.
20 Dec 1965	Transferred to MAG-13, 1st MAW, Iwakuni, Japan.
15 Feb 1966-1 Mar 1967	Deployed to Chu Lai, RVN; assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
2 Mar-3 Jun 1967	At MCAS Iwakuni and transferred to MAG-15, 1st MAW (Rear).
4 Jun 1967-11 Feb 1970	At Chu Lai, RVN; assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
12 Feb-25 Jul 1970	Transferred to MAG-13, 1st MAW, Chu Lai, RVN.
26 Jul 1970-11 May 1971	Transferred to MAG-11, 1st MAW, Da Nang Air Base, RVN.
12 May-29 Oct 1971	Assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW, at MCAS Iwakuni.
30 Oct 1971-15 Jan 1972	Squadron deployed to USNF Naha, Okinawa.
16 Jan-17 May 1972	At MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan.
18 May 1972-29 Jan 1973	Deployed with MAG-12, 1st MAW, Bien Hoa, RVN.
30 Jan 1973-31 Aug 1974	Squadron returned to MCAS Iwakuni with MAG-12.
1 Sep 1974	VMA-311 relocated to MCAS Beaufort, S. C. and assigned to MAG-32, 2d MAW, Personnel and aircraft remained in Japan and VMA-324 assumed the designation of the squadron.
12 Jan 1976	Squadron transferred to MCAS El Toro, California and assigned to MAG-13, 3d MAW.

Appendix B
COMMANDING OFFICERS

Maj Ralph K. Rottet ..... 1 Dec 1942 - 31 Jan 1943
2d Lt Harry B. Woodman ..... 1 Feb 1943 - 4 Feb 1943
2d Lt Roy A. Neuendorf ..... 5 Feb 1943 - 15 Feb 1943
2d Lt Michael J. Curran, Jr. ..... 16 Feb 1943 - 25 Feb 1943
Capt Jack D. Kane ..... 26 Feb 1943 - 31 May 1943

Maj Harry B. Hooper, Jr. ..... 1 Jun 1943 - 22 Oct 1943
Maj Charles M. Kunz ..... 24 Oct 1943 - 9 Feb 1945
Maj Perry L. Shuman ..... 11 Feb 1945 - 14 Jun 1945
Maj Michael R. Yunck ..... 15 Jun 1945 - 25 May 1946
Maj James C. Otis ..... 26 May 1946 - 11 Jun 1946

Capt James W. Baker ..... 12 Jun 1946 - 16 Jul 1946
1st Lt Rupert C. Wesley, Jr. ..... 18 Jul 1946 - 21 Oct 1946
Maj Francis E. Pierce, Jr. ..... 22 Oct 1946 - 31 Dec 1946
Capt Joseph E. Davis ..... 1 Jan 1947 - 3 Mar 1947
Capt Elswin P. Dunn ..... 4 Mar 1947 - 29 Apr 1947

Maj Otis V. Calhoun, Jr. ..... 30 Apr 1947 - 31 Aug 1947
Lt Col Harlan Rogers ..... 1 Sep 1947 - 13 Apr 1948
Maj Michael R. Yunck ..... 14 Apr 1948 - 18 Apr 1948
Lt Col John P. Condon ..... 19 Apr 1948 - 10 Jul 1949
Maj Joseph F. Quilty, Jr. ..... 11 Jul 1949 - 26 Jul 1949

Lt Col Paul J. Fontana ..... 27 Jul 1949 - 13 May 1950
Lt Col Neil R. MacIntyre ..... 14 May 1950 - 10 Mar 1951
Lt Col John F. Kinney ..... 11 Mar 1951 - 27 Jul 1951
Maj Frank S. Hoffecker (Actg.) ..... 28 Jul 1951 - 31 Jul 1951
Lt Col James B. Moore ..... 1 Aug 1951 - 30 Nov 1951

Lt Col John S. Payne ..... 1 Dec 1951 - 26 Feb 1952
Lt Col Darrell D. Irwin ..... 27 Feb 1952 - 2 Jun 1952
Maj Henry W. Hise ..... 3 Jun 1952 - 9 Jun 1952
Maj Kenneth D. Frazier ..... 10 Jun 1952 - 25 Jun 1952
Lt Col William J. Sims ..... 26 Jun 1952 - 23 Sep 1952

Maj Walter R. Bartosh ..... 24 Sep 1952 - 30 Sep 1952
Lt Col Arthur H. Adams ..... 1 Oct 1952 - 31 Jan 1953
Lt Col Francis K. Coss ..... 1 Feb 1953 - 20 Apr 1953
Lt Col Arthur M. Moran ..... 21 Apr 1953 - 31 May 1953
Lt Col Bernard McShane ..... 1 Jun 1953 - 20 Aug 1953

Lt Col Martin E.W. Oelrich ..... 21 Aug 1953 - 28 Feb 1954
Lt Col Edward K. Pedersen ..... 1 Mar 1954 - 20 Jun 1954
Lt Col Michael R. Yunck ..... 21 Jun 1954 - 25 Nov 1954
Maj Manning T. Jannell ..... 26 Nov 1954 - 20 Jun 1955
Lt Col James E. Johnson ..... 21 Jun 1955 - 5 Jun 1956

Lt Col Harold L. Lantz ..... 6 Jun 1956 - 11 May 1957
Lt Col Murray M. Staples ..... 12 May 1957 - 24 Jun 1957

Lt Col Robert E. Smith, Jr. ..... 25 Jun 1957 - 7 Aug 1958
Maj/Lt Col David D. Rickabaugh ..... 8 Aug 1958 - 8 Jul 1959
Lt Col Paul A. Lemarie, Jr. ..... 9 Jul 1959 - 20 Jan 1960

Lt Col Ray D. Rushlow ..... 21 Jan 1960 - 29 Mar 1962
Lt Col Harry Hunter, Jr. ..... 30 Mar 1962 - 8 Jul 1963
Lt Col William L. Walker ..... 9 Jul 1963 - 16 Apr 1964
Lt Col Bernard J. Stender ..... 17 Apr 1964 - 25 Nov 1965
Lt Col Jack W. Harris ..... 26 Nov 1965 - 20 May 1966

Lt Col Paul G. McMahon ..... 21 May 1966 - 5 Dec 1966
Lt Col Roger A. Morris ..... 6 Dec 1966 - 7 Jun 1967
Maj Eugene Lichtenwalter ..... 8 Jun 1967 - 25 Aug 1967
Lt Col Edgar K. Jacks ..... 26 Aug 1967 - 21 Sep 1967
Lt Col Richard B. Taber ..... 22 Sep 1967 - 10 Mar 1968

Lt Col Norman B. McCrary ..... 11 Mar 1968 - 24 Sep 1968
Lt Col Charles O. Hiett ..... 25 Sep 1968 - 30 Apr 1969
Lt Col David A. Kelly ..... 1 May 1969 - 24 Nov 1969
Lt Col Arthur R. Hickle ..... 25 Nov 1969 - 31 May 1970
Lt Col James M. Bannan ..... 1 Jun 1970 - 10 Oct 1970

Lt Col Jerome T. Hagan ..... 11 Oct 1970 - 24 Jun 1971
Lt Col Karlton L. Batt ..... 30 Jun 1971 - 13 Mar 1972
Lt Col Kevin M. Johnston ..... 14 Mar 1972 - 6 Sep 1972
Lt Col John J. Caldas, Jr. ..... 7 Sep 1972 - 12 Jul 1973
Lt Col John H. Miller ..... 13 Jul 1973 - 5 Jun 1974

Lt Col Ralph K. Park ..... 6 Jun 1974 - 31 Aug 1974
Lt Col Bruce B. Rutherford ..... 1 Sep 1974 - 20 Jun 1975
LtCol Dorsie D. Page, Jr. ..... 21 Jun 1975 - 4 Feb 1977
LtCol Albert J. Ransom ..... 5 Feb 1977 -

Appendix C
STREAMER ENTITLEMENTS

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS
Okinawa, 4 Apr-14 Jul 1945
Korea, 8 Mar-30 Apr 1951, 18 May-30 Jun 1951, 3 Aug-29 Sep 1951
Vietnam, 1 Jun-15 Dec 1965, 15 Feb 1966-15 Sep 1967

ARMY DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION STREAMER
Korea, 22 Nov-14 Dec 1950

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER AND TWO BRONZE STARS
Korea, 1 Aug 1952-27 Jul 1953
Vietnam, 18-23 Aug 1965
Vietnam, 7 May 1965-15 Apr 1966
Vietnam, 15 Sep 1967-31 Mar 1968
Vietnam, 1 Apr 1968-31 Mar 1969
Vietnam, 12 Feb-1 Jun 1970
Vietnam, 1 Nov 1970-7 May 1971
Vietnam, 17 May-31 Dec 1972

ASIATIC-PACIFIC STREAMER WITH THREE BRONZE STARS
Marshall Islands, 7-8 Feb 1944
Okinawa, 2 Apr-30Jun 1945
Third Fleet Operations Against Japan, 22 Jul 1945

WORLD WAR II VICTORY STREAMER
1 Dec 1942-31 Dec 1946

NAVY OCCUPATION SERVICE STREAMER WITH ASIA CLASP
Japan, 30 Sep 1945-20 Jun 1946

NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR
27 Jun 1950-27 Jul 1954
1 Jan 1961-15 Aug 1974

KOREAN SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER AND THREE BRONZE STARS
Communist China Aggression, 10 Dec 1950-24 Jan 1951
First U.N. Counteroffensive, 25 Jan-21 Apr 1951
Communist China Spring Offensive, 22 Apr-8 Jul 1951
U. N. Summer-Fall Offensive, 9 Jul-27 Nov 1951
2d Korean Winter, 28 Nov 1951-30 Apr 1952
Korean Defense, Summer-Fall, 1952, 1 May-30 Nov 1952
3d Korean Winter, 1 Dec 1952-30 Apr 1953
Korea, Summer-Fall, 1953, 1 May-27 Jul 1953

VIETNAM SERVICE STREAMER WITH TWO SILVER AND FOUR BRONZE STARS
Vietnam Defense Campaign, 24 May-8 Dec 1965
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Campaign, 15 Feb-30 Jun 1966
Vietnamese Counteroffensive, Phase II, 1 Jul 1966-1 Mar 1967
Vietnamese Counteroffensive, Phase III, 4 Jun 1967-29 Jan 1968
Tet Counteroffensive, 30 Jan-1 Apr 1968

Vietnamese Counteroffensive, Phase IV, 2 Apr-30 Jun 1968
Vietnamese Counteroffensive, Phase V, 1 Jul-1 Nov 1968
Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase VI, 2 Nov 1968-22 Feb 1969
Tet 69/Counteroffensive, 23 Feb-8 Jun 1969
Vietnam, Summer-Fall 1969, 9 Jun-31 Oct 1969
Vietnam, Winter-Spring 1970, 1 Nov 1969-30 Apr 1970
Sanctuary Counteroffensive, 1 May-30 Jun 1970
Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase VII, 1 Jul 1970-11 May 1971
Vietnam Ceasefire Campaign, 18 May 1972-28 Jan 1973

KOREAN PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER
9 Dec 1950-11 Jun 1953

VIETNAM CROSS OF GALLANTRY WITH PALM
24 May 1965-20 Sep 1969

VIETNAM MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION CIVIL ACTIONS STREAMER
21 Sep 1969-20 Nov 1970

Appendix D

SQUADRON INSIGNIA

The Tomcat first appeared on VMA-311 aircraft after the Korean War. Although individual artists have made minor changes in the design, the basic idea is unchanged. The elements of the insignia are: the cat, which naturally represents the Tomcats; a bomb which signifies that the squadron flew bomb missions in both World War II and Korea; the flames coming from the bomb symbolize that 311 was one of the first Marine jet squadrons and the first to fly jets in combat; the patch on the cat's derriere to signify frequent relocations and "kicking around"; and the heart developed from the matrix letters WL, which were phonetically pronounced as William Love and caused the squadron to become known as Willy Lovers. Versions of the Tomcat insignia pictured here are (clockwise from the center):

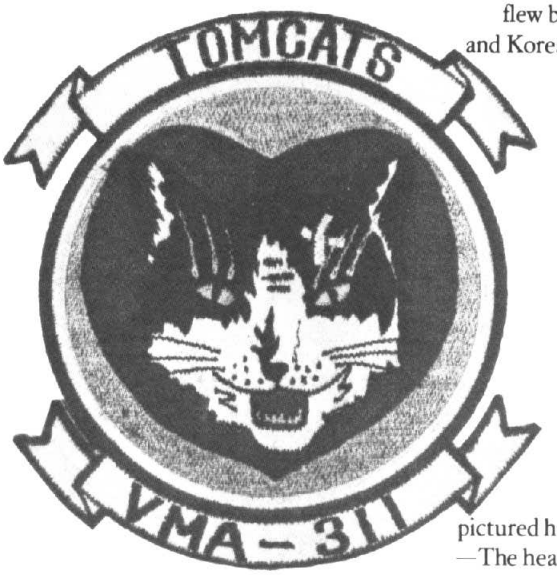
—The head of the Tomcat was adopted as the official squadron patch in 1961.

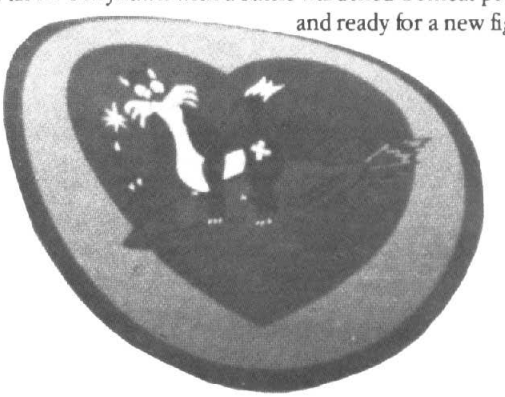
—A recent insignia shows the Tomcat with a sharpened claw out and ready for attack.

—The current version in which the Tomcat rides with both paws on the bomb.

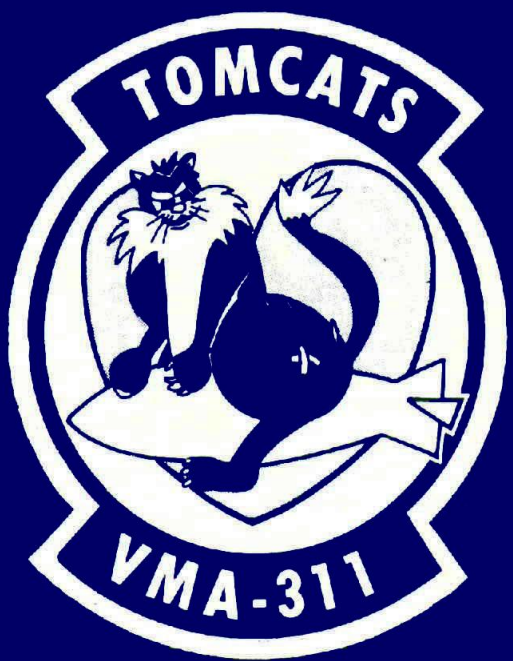
—A version almost identical with the original. The difference is that the cat is on a bomb, where the original had him riding a stovepipe with a bomb attached.

—A version in which the matrix letters WL share space on an A-4 Skyhawk with a battle-hardened Tomcat poised and ready for a new fight.





The squadron insignia of VMA-311 is shown on the back cover. For a detailed history of the insignia and other illustrations see Appendix D.


TOMCATS
VMA-311