

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

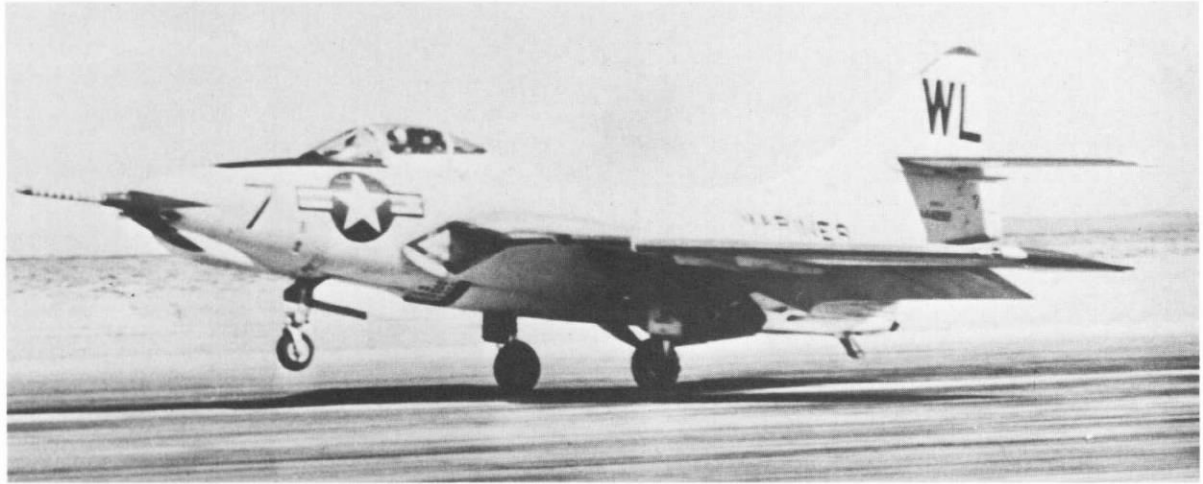
After a week of vigorous flying, the VMF-311 team was selected. In addition to the commanding officer, the team consisted of Captain Joe A. Lindsey, Captain Herbert V. Lundin, First Lieutenant Robert R. Norton, First Lieutenant Gene H. Purvis, and Second Lieutenant David B. Fite.

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 air-speed 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

⁴Prior 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 primarily 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 Atlantic 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 1½ 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 Auxiliary 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 particularly 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

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

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.

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

*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 an aircraft carrier deck including an arresting gear.

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

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 techniques.

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.

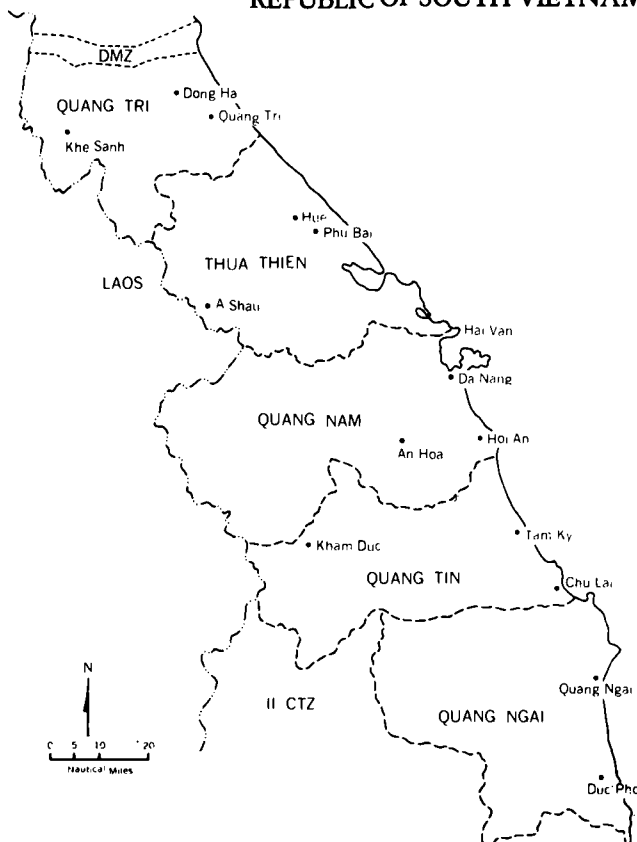
On 25 August, disaster was narrowly avoided when the pilot flying wing on First Lieutenant Roy J. Stocking, Jr., released a Mark-82, 500-pound bomb as the flight was in a turn. The bomb fell through Lieutenant Stocking's right wing, but fortunately had not traveled far enough to arm. The pilot was able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

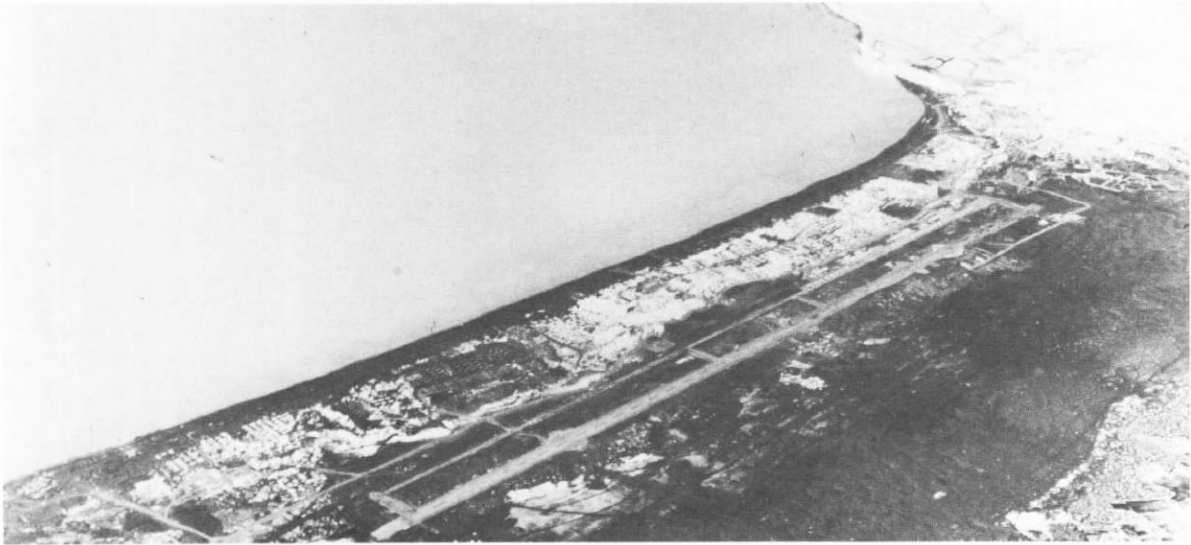
After the last pass, the ground unit reported that 11 of the 15 emplacements had been destroyed.³

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 ascent. 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. The 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."

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 antiaircraft 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. Gutormson 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 horizontal 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. Hiatt, 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.

¹⁵* 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-constructed enemy bunker about 30 miles south of Chu Lai.



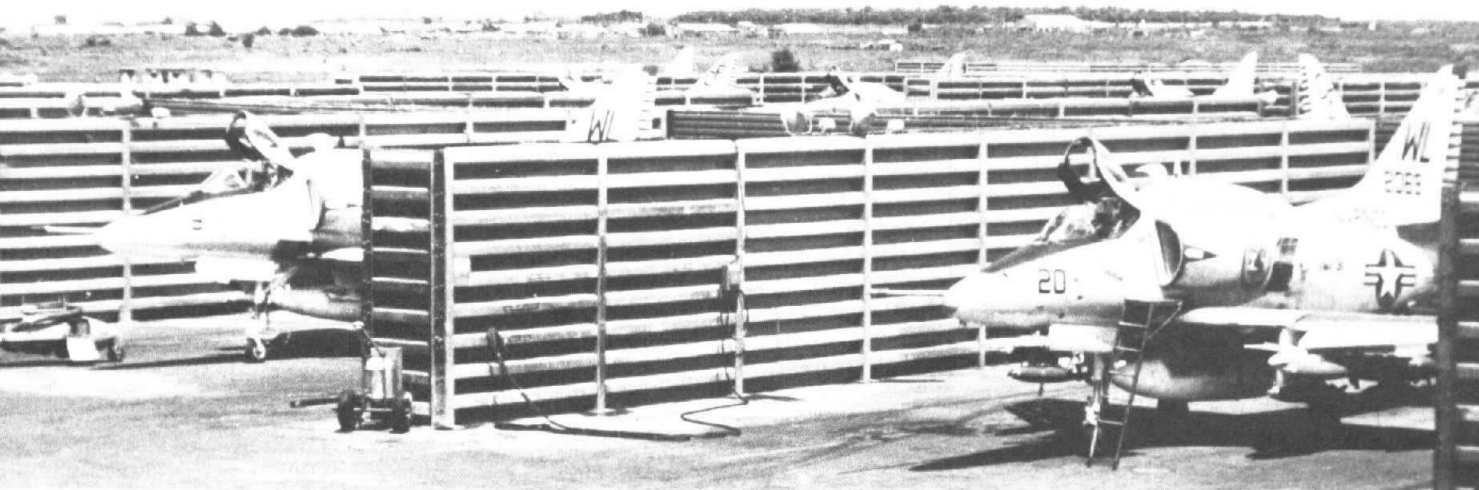
USMC Photo A422637
Lance Corporal William E. Lysle, left, and Lance Corporal Porter R. Tkachuk, right, mix a batch of soap to wash the dirt and grime from an A-4E Skyhawk. Both men are members of VMA-311.

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 anti-aircraft



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 MAF 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 ap-

proximately 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 12½ 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 10½ 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 goodbye 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 unequalled 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.

NOTES

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15. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

16. War Diary, March 1944.

17. *Ibid.*

18. USMC Casualty Report, Case History Cards, (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC), hereafter Casualty Cards.

19. History of VMA-311, *op.cit.* p. 6.

20. War Diary, May 1944.

21. War Diary, July 1944.

22. Sherrod, *Aviation*, p. 235.

23. Casualty Cards.

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25. Sherrod, *Aviation*, p. 371.

26. War Diary, April 1945.

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28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. War Diary, May 1945.

31. Sherrod, *Aviation*, p. 392.

32. War Diary, May 1945.

33. Casualty Cards.

34. Biographical File (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).

35. Col Michael R. Yunck ltr to DirMCHist&Mus, dtd 28May76, Comment File, "History of VMA-311."

36. War Diary, June 1945.

37. War Diary, July 1945.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Sherrod, *Aviation*, pp. 412, 427, 431-432.

40. War Diary, July 1945.

41. War Diary, August 1945.

42. War Diary, September 1945.

43. *Ibid.*

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1. War Diary, October 1945.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Muster Rolls, VMF-311, November 1945.

4. War Diary, January 1946.

5. Muster Rolls, VMF-311, June 1946.

6. *Flight Jacket*, (MCAS El Toro, California) 2 May 1947, p. 1, hereafter *Flight Jacket*, date, and page.

7. *Flight Jacket*, 9 May 1947, p. 8.

8. Paul Hicks, "Jet Squadron," *The Leatherneck*, V. XXXII, No. 1 (January 1949), p. 11.

9. *Flight Jacket*, 14 April 1948, p. 8.

10. *Flight Jacket*, 2 April 1948, p. 1.

11. *Flight Jacket*, 14 April 1948, p. 2.

12. MajGen John P. Condon's official biography (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).

13. Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

14. *Flight Jacket*, 23 July 1948, p. 1.

15. *Jane's Aircraft 1949-1950*, pp. 240c-241c.

16. Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

17. MajGen John P. Condon, intvw by OralHistU, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, dtd December 1970, pp. 89-93.

18. *Flight Jacket*, 23 September 1949, p. 8.

19. MajGen Paul J. Fontana's official biography (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).

20. *Flight Jacket*, 30 September 1949, p. 1.

21. *Flight Jacket*, 17 February 1950, p. 1.

22. *Flight Jacket*, 24 March 1950, p. 1.

23. *Jane's Aircraft 1949-1950*, p. 228c.

24. *Flight Jacket*, 24 March 1950, p. 1.

25. VMF-311 Historical Diary, 30 November 1950 (FedRecCntr, Mechanicsburg, Pa.), hereafter HistDiary and date.

26. *Ibid.*

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Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from HistDiary December 1950- May 1955.

1. Col Neil R. MacIntyre ltr to DirMCHist&Mus, dtd 15Jun76, Comment File, "History of VMA-311," hereafter MacIntyre comments.
2. LtCol Pat Meid and Maj James M. Yingling, *Operations in West Korea—U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1972) Vol V, pp. 26, 489 hereafter *Operations in West Korea*.
3. Lynn Montross, Major Hubard D. Kuokka, and Maj Norman W. Hicks, *The East-Central Front—U.S. Marine Operations in Korea 1950-1953* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1962) Vol. IV, p. 64, hereafter *The East-Central Front*.
4. Casualty Cards.
5. *Operations in West Korea*, p. 489.
6. MacIntyre comments.
7. Casualty Cards.
8. MacIntyre comments.
9. MajGen Paul J. Fontana ltr to DirMCHist&Mus, dtd 9Jun76, Comment File, "History of VMA-311."
10. VMF-311 Monthly Jet Information, April 1951, contained in HistDiary, May 1951, hereafter JetBul, date; HistDiary, date.
11. Casualty Cards.
12. *Operations in West Korea*, p. 289.
13. *The East-Central Front*, p. 148.
14. Casualty Cards.
15. *The East-Central Front*, p. 144.
16. *Operations in West Korea*, p. 289.
17. *The East-Central Front*, pp. 95-96.
18. JetBul, June 1951; HistDiary, July 1951.
19. Casualty Cards.
20. JetBul, July 1951, HistDiary, August 1951.
21. 1st MAW Bulletin, No. 16-51, dtd 9 September 1951, contained in HistDiary, September 1951.
22. HistDiary, August 1951.
23. Casualty Cards.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Operations in West Korea*, p. 27.
26. Casualty Cards.
27. HistDiary, April 1952.
28. Casualty Cards.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. BGen Henry W. Hise ltr to DirMCHist&Mus, dtd 7Jun76, Comment File, "History of VMA-311."
32. *Operations in West Korea*, p. 65.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 577.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 492.
36. Casualty Cards.
37. VMA-311 Unit History File (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).
38. *Jane's Aircraft 1955-1956*, p. 263.
39. Col John H. Glenn, Jr., Biographical File (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).
40. *Operations in West Korea*, pp. 291-295.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 350.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
44. Casualty Cards.
45. *Operations in West Korea*, pp. 333-334.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 374.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 376.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
52. HistDiary, February 1954.

The Post-Korean Period: 1955-1965

- Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from *Flight Jacket* (MCAS El Toro, California), 1 September 1955-16 April 1965.
1. VMA-311 Unit History File, (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).
 2. *Flight Jacket*, 8 February 1957, p. 3.
 3. *Ibid.*, 1 March 1957, p. 1.
 4. *Jane's Aircraft 1957-1958*, pp. 301-302.
 5. CNO Spdltr 2608P33 dtd 2 May 1957, cited in VMA-311 Unit History File (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).
 6. VMA-311 Unit History File, *op.cit.*
 7. *Jane's Aircraft*, pp. 285-286.
 8. *Marine Attack Squadron 311 1960-1961*, Cruise Book (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC), hereafter VMA-311 Cruise Book.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. *Torii Teller* (MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan) 12 June 1960, p. 2.
 13. VMA-311 Cruise Book.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *Torii Teller*, *op.cit.* 12 March 1962, p. 2.
 16. VMA-311 Cruise Book.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. *Jane's Aircraft 1963-1964*, p. 205.

The Vietnam Years: 1965-1973

- Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from Marine Attack Squadron 311 Command Chronology June 1965-June 1973; 1st Marine Aircraft Wing Command Chronology, May 1965-October 1970; and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing Command Chronologies, Informational Services Office Appendixes, August 1965-October 1970 (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).
1. VMA-311 Command Chronology, June 1965.
 2. MAG-12 Command Chronology, October 1965.
 3. 1st MAW Command Chronology, December 1965, Appendix 20.
 4. MAG-13 Command Chronology, January 1966.
 5. Jack Shulimson, "Marines in Vietnam - 1966" Ms (HistSec Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).
 6. 1st MAW Command Chronology, February 1967, Appendix 7.
 7. VMA-311 Command Chronology, October 1967.
 8. 1st MAW Command Chronology, January 1968, Appendix 6.
 9. Capt Moyers S. Shore II, *The Battle for Khe Sanh*. (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1969), p. 53.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
12. FMFPac, Operations of the Marine Forces in Vietnam, January 1968, (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC) p. 18.
13. 1st MAW Command Chronology, May 1968, Appendix 6.
14. 1st MAW Command Chronology, September 1968, Appendix 6.
15. FMFPac, Operations of the Marine Forces in Vietnam, December 1968, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
16. 1st MAW Command Chronology, June 1970, Appendix 6.
17. Navy Preliminary Report of Aircraft Accident 1-71A, cited in 1st MAW Command Chronology, September 1970.
18. Navy Supplementary Report of Aircraft Accident 2-71A, cited in 1st MAW Command Chronology, September 1970.
19. BGen Edwin H. Simmons, "Marine Corps Operations

in Vietnam 1969-1972," *Naval Review*, 1973 (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1973), p. 221.

Conclusion

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMA-311 Command Chronology, January-June 1974 - January-June 1976, (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).

1. MAG-12 Command Chronology, July-December 1974.
2. Col John H. Miller's comments, Comment File, "History of VMA-311."
3. *Ibid.*
4. Lieutenant Colonel Dorsie D. Page, Jr., ltr to Dir MC Hist&Mus, dtd 30Jul76, Comment File, "History of VMA-311".

Appendix A

CHRONOLOGY

1 Dec 1942	Activated as Marine Fighting Squadron 311 at MCAS, Cherry Point, N.C. and assigned to 3d. MAW.	7 Apr- 26 Aug 1945	Okinawa Operations. Assigned to MAG-31, 2d MAW, Tenth Army Tactical Air Force.
18 Apr 1943	Moved to Parris Island, S.C.	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.
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 <i>Nassau</i> (CVE 16).	9-29 Sep 1945	Squadron in process of moving from Okinawa to Yokosuka, Japan for occupational duty.
30 Sep 1943	Ground echelon sailed on board USAT <i>Puebla</i> . Assigned to MAG-31, FMF.	20 Jun- 3 Jul 1946	En route from Japan to U.S. on board USS <i>Saba</i> (APA 232).
5 Oct 1943	Air echelon arrived Tutuila, Samoa.	4 Jul 1946	Arrived at San Diego, California.
6 Oct 1943	Designation changed to MAG-31, 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing.	5-17 Jul 1946	Attached to MAG-31, Marine Air West Coast, MCAS Miramar.
8 Oct 1943	Air echelon arrived Wallis Island.	17 Jul 1946	Reduced in strength to one officer and transferred to MAG-32.
19 Oct 1943	Ground echelon arrived Wallis Island; disembarked next day.	26 Sep- Nov 1946	Station changed to MCAS El Toro, California. Squadron reconstituted at El Toro.
26 Jan 1944	Embarked on board USS <i>Cape Constantine</i> and USS <i>Typhoon</i> (LST-1118) en route Roi, Kwajalein Atoll.	21 Apr 1947	Transferred to MAG-12, MAWC.
7 Feb 1944	Squadron arrived Roi Island.	1 Oct 1947	Designation changed to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
23 Feb 1944	Squadron moved to Kwajalein Island in LST 477.	15 Apr 1948	Transferred to 1st MAW as an independent squadron.
23 Mar 1944	First attack against enemy.	20 Jul 1948	First Marine west coast squadron to receive jet aircraft.
26 Mar 1944	Squadron moved from Kwajalein to Roi.	1 Oct 1949	Reassigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
May 1944- Jan 1945	Participated in neutralization of enemy-occupied Marshall Islands.	28 Aug 1950	Transferred to MAG-15, Air FMFPac, MCAS El Toro from MAG-12.
11 Mar 1945	MAG-31 transferred from 4th MBDAW to 2d MAW.	10-13 Nov 1950	Squadron aircraft ferried to NAS San Diego for preparation for shipment overseas.
7 Apr 1945	Flight echelon catapulted from USS <i>Breton</i> (CVE 23) and USS <i>Sitkoh Bay</i> (CVE 86) and landed at Yontan Airfield, Okinawa. Squadron shot down its first enemy aircraft.	14 Nov 1950	Departed for Japan on board USS <i>Bairoko</i> (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.	30 Mar 1962	Transferred to MAG-15, 3d MAW, MCAS, El Toro.
10 Dec 1950	First squadron combat mission flown and the first time Marine jet aircraft were flown in combat.	30 Mar 1965	Squadron aircraft were flown from El Toro to NAS Atsugi, Japan.
13 Dec 1950	Moved to Pusan, Korea (K-9).	1 Apr 1965	Transferred to MAG-12, 1st MAW, MCAS Iwakuni.
25 Jan 1951	Redeployed to Itami AFB, Japan.	7 May 1965	Deployed to the Republic of Vietnam with MAG-12.
7 Feb 1951	Joined MAG-33, 1st MAW.	24 May 1965	Ground elements arrived at Chu Lai, RVN.
17 Feb 1951	Redeployed to Pohang, Korea (K-3) by air and LST 914.	1 Jun 1965	Air elements arrived in Chu Lai.
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.	16 Dec 1965- 14 Feb 1966	Deployed to MCAS Iwakuni.
28 Mar 1952	10,000th sortie flown by Captain F. J. Hubka.	20 Dec 1965	Transferred to MAG-13, 1st MAW, Iwakuni, Japan.
27 Jul 1953	Capt W. I. Armagost flew last Marine jet mission of Korean War.	15 Feb 1966- 1 Mar 1967	Deployed to Chu Lai, RVN; assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
27 Apr 1955	Embarked on board USS <i>Princeton</i> (CVE 37) at Iwakuni and departed therefrom for CONUS.	2 Mar- 3 Jun 1967	At MCAS Iwakuni and transferred to MAG-15, 1st MAW (Rear).
31 May 1955	Squadron arrived at San Diego and departed for MCAS El Toro.	4 Jun 1967- 11 Feb 1970	At Chu Lai, RVN; assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
1 Jun 1955	Redesignated from MAG-33, 1st MAW to MAG-33, Air FMFPac.	12 Feb- 25 Jul 1970	Transferred to MAG-13, 1st MAW, Chu Lai, RVN.
15 Sep 1955	Designation changed to MAG-33, 3d MAW from MAG-33, AirFMFPac.	26 Jul 1970- 11 May 1971	Transferred to MAG-11, 1st MAW, Da Nang Air Base, RVN.
1 Jun 1957	Designation changed from VMF-311 to Marine Attack Squadron 311 (VMA-311).	12 May- 29 Oct 1971	Assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW, at MCAS Iwakuni.
1 Aug 1957	Transferred from MAG-33 to MAG-15.	30 Oct 1971- 15 Jan 1972	Squadron deployed to USNF Naha, Okinawa.
18 Mar 1961	Squadron deployed to 1st MAW, Japan by MSTs and Marine transport aircraft.	16 Jan- 17 May 1972	At MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan.
23 Mar 1961	Transferred to MAG-12, 1st MAW, MCAF Iwakuni.	18 May 1972- 29 Jan 1973	Deployed with MAG-12, 1st MAW, Bien Hoa, RVN.
4 Apr 1961	Transferred to CAG-15, USS <i>Coral Sea</i> (CVA 43).	30 Jan 1973- 31 Aug 1974	Squadron returned to MCAS Iwakuni with MAG-12.
13 Apr 1961	Transferred to CAG-2, USS <i>Midway</i> (CVA 41).	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.
3 Jun 1961	Transferred to MAG-12, 1st MAW, MCAS Iwakuni.	12 Jan 1976	Squadron transferred to MCAS El Toro, California and assigned to MAG-13, 3d MAW.
27 Mar 1962	Squadron departed NAS Cubi Point, P.I. on board Marine transport aircraft while aircraft were transported by surface.		

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. Hoeffcker (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. Hiatt 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
 Lt Col Dorsie D. Page, Jr. 21 Jun 1975 - 4 Feb 1977
 Lt Col 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-30 Jun 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

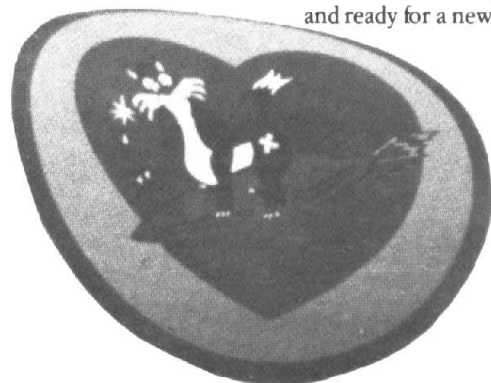
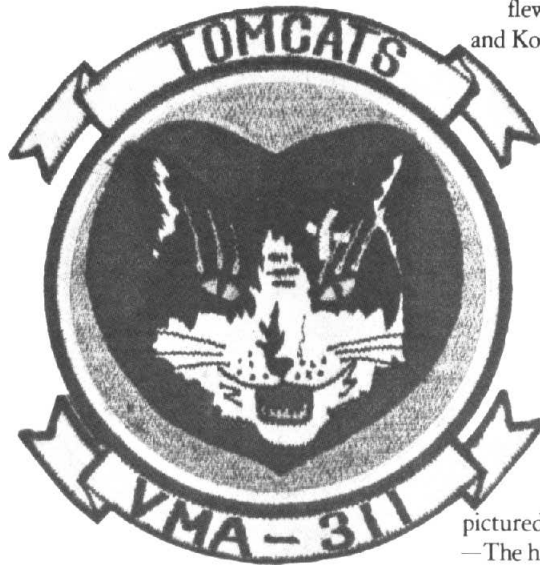
symbolize that 311 was one of the first Marine jet squadrons and the first to fly jets in combat; the patch on the cat's derriere to signify frequent relocations and "kicking around"; and the heart developed from the matrix letters WL, which were phonetically pronounced as William Love and caused the 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.

