

A HISTORY OF MARINE OBSERVATION SQUADRON SIX



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

VMO-6 often possessed both fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft to carry out its assigned missions. The unit's "composite" nature is nicely captured in this Korean War-vintage photograph of a squadron HO3S-1 helicopter and an OE observation airplane. (Department of Defense [USMC] Photo A131131)

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by

Lieutenant Colonel Gary W. Parker, USMC

and

Major Frank M. Batha, Jr., USMC



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FOREWORD

This history is one of a series being prepared by the History and Museums Division to bring to light the achievements and contributions of individual squadrons to Marine aviation.

Marine Observation Squadron 6 distinguished itself throughout a period which spanned nearly five decades and three major conflicts, but its most significant contribution to Marine aviation was its pioneering use of helicopters in combat.

Lieutenant Colonel Gary W. Parker and Major Frank M. Batha, Jr., are co-authors of this history. Lieutenant Colonel Parker, who holds a bachelor of science degree from the University of Baltimore and a master of arts degree from Pepperdine University, prepared the first draft of the manuscript. Major Batha, who has a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Utah and a master of arts degree from the University of West Florida, prepared the comment edition and final draft. Both officers are experienced helicopter pilots who served combat tours in Vietnam.

It is our hope that this history will be read as a tribute to the men who have contributed to the accomplishments of the squadron, and it is our desire that readers feel free to comment on the narrative as well as provide any additional information or illustrations which might enhance a future edition.



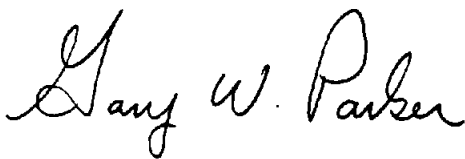
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PREFACE

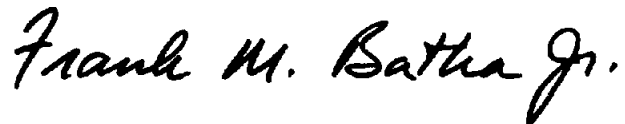
This history is written to provide a concise operational narrative about a distinguished Marine Corps unit. Marine Observation Squadron 6's wide variety of experiences closely parallels the larger story of Marine aviation. From the 1920s through the Vietnam era, VMO-6 provided the kind of outstanding air support Marines have come to expect.

The authors wish to extend their appreciation to the professional staff of the History and Museums Division, whose help greatly assisted in completing this project. Special mention and thanks go to: Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Chief Historian, for his editorial assistance; Mr. Richard A. "Buzz" Hillman for his preparation of maps and book design; Mrs. Regina H. Strother (formerly of the History and Museums Division Photo Archives Section, an agency since absorbed into the Defense Audiovisual Agency) for her diligent efforts in supplying many of the photographs used; and to our typesetters, Corporal Joseph J. Hynes and Lance Corporal Mark J. Zigante.

In general, photographs which were taken prior to World War II are held at the National Archives and Records Service (NARS), Still Pictures Branch, Room 18N, 7th and Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest, Washington, D.C., 20408. Photographs of World War II subjects and subsequent events are held by the Defense Audiovisual Agency (DAVA), Building 168, Anacostia Naval Station, Washington, D.C., 20374.



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An OE-2 "Bird Dog" from VMO-6 flies a training mission in 1956 near Camp Pendleton, California.



A History of Marine Observation Squadron Six

*The Early Years—World War II and China Service—Korea and the Advent of Helicopters
Pendleton Once More—Combat: Vietnam—Tenancy on Okinawa and Decommissioning*

The Early Years

Marine Observation Squadron 6 antecedents reach back to the 1920 activation of Flight E, 3d Air Squadron at Quantico, Virginia. Frequent modifications of the Marine Corps' aviation structure during the formative years caused a succession of unit redesignations. The term "division" was substituted for "flight" in 1922 in order to coincide with Navy aeronautical terminology, and Flight E, 3d Air Squadron was redesignated Division 1, Fighting Squadron 1. In 1925 another reorganization brought with it unit redesignation to Division 1, Marine Observation Squadron 3, and on 1 July 1927, this designation was changed to Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VO-6M).¹

The squadron's abbreviation, VO-6M, described the unit in a manner still essentially in use today. "V" denoted a heavier than air unit. "O" indicated the squadron's primary mission was observation. "6" represented the fact that it was the sixth such unit formed, and "M" distinguished it as a Marine rather than Navy squadron.^{2*}

Activities during VO-6M's first six months were typical of all Marine Corps squadrons during the 1920s. Assigned to Aircraft Squadrons, East Coast Expeditionary Force, Quantico, Virginia, the squadron was manned with six officers and 33 enlisted Marines. It possessed six aircraft: two DH-4B-1 "Liberty Plane" biplanes; one Loening OL-2 amphibian biplane; two Consolidated NY-1 convertible biplane trainers; and one Vought VE-7 biplane trainer. Using these assets of men and aircraft, the

squadron trained for its observation mission and provided preliminary flight training for student naval aviators and naval aviation pilots.** It wasn't long, however, before the squadron was doing more than merely training.

In early 1927 the 2d Marine Brigade, an expeditionary force composed of Marine Corps ground and aviation units, was sent into Nicaragua to assist the Diaz government in quelling the revolutionary activity of insurgents led by General Jose Maria Moncada, and by June the internal disorders appeared to have been resolved. The brigade's strength was significantly reduced because of the bright outlook, but the political truce was quickly shattered when one of Moncada's lieutenants, Augusto Sandino, broke away from his leader and directed a resurgence of rebel activity. To meet the Sandinista threat American reinforcements were required, and VO-6M was among the units designated to join the brigade.

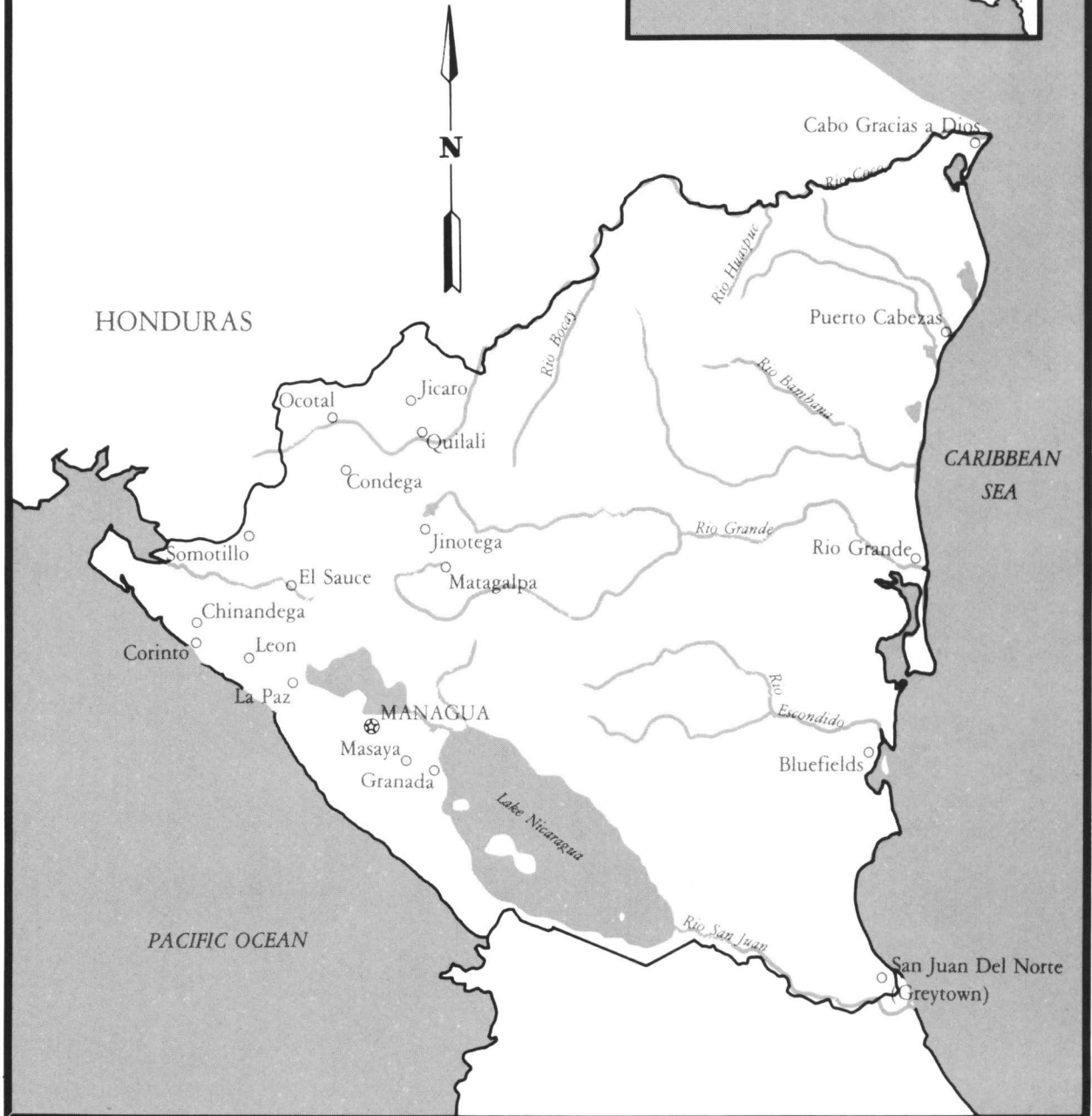
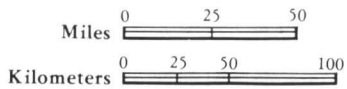
Departing from Quantico on 27 January 1928, the squadron delayed for a day at the Hampton Roads Naval Base before boarding the USS *Saratoga* for further transportation to Nicaragua. After three weeks of travel, which included six days of delay in the Panama Canal Zone, the squadron disembarked at Corinto, Nicaragua, on 16 February and proceeded to Managua by rail.

The reception of VO-6M had been well arranged for by the other Marine aviation unit in Nicaragua, Marine Observation Squadron 7 (VO-7M). When the train carrying VO-6M arrived in Nicaragua it was shunted out to the aviation siding where the newcomers were welcomed. The sense of camaraderie which existed in Marine aviation during those early years may be gleaned from the descrip-

*In the 1940s, most squadrons began using three digit numerical designations which reflected the Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) and Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) to which they were assigned, e.g., VMF-311 was the first fighter squadron assigned to MAG-31 in the 3d MAW and VMF-312 was the second fighter squadron formed in MAG-31.

**During the 1920s Marines attended a "wash out" course of preliminary flight training prior to going to the Navy's flight school at Pensacola, Florida. It should also be noted that enlisted personnel were assigned as naval aviation pilots (NAP), and in fact twelve of VO-6M's enlisted men were NAPs.

NICARAGUA



tion of VO-6M's arrival by Major Ross E. Rowell, the brigade air officer, in his weekly operations report.

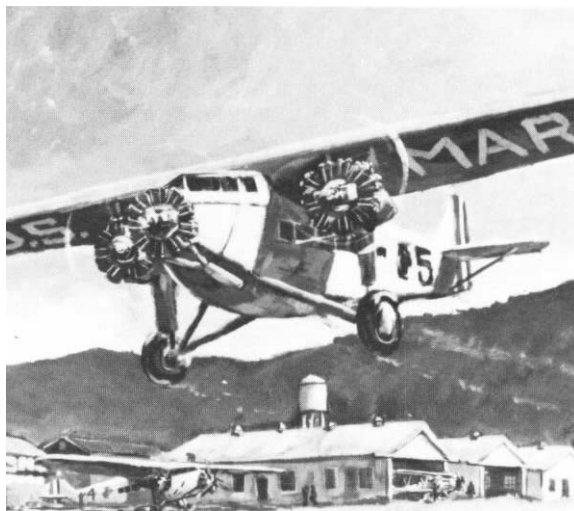
When the train pulled into the station in Nicaragua on the 16th, the heads sticking out of the coach windows were a sight for sore eyes. "Pop" Stewart, Archie Paschal, Tommie Whitman, "Skinny" Leeper, Joe Kittle, and many others of the old guard of Quantico. . . . They were welcomed by the squadron here, and many facetious remarks were made. Chow was ready for them, tents up and wired with electric lights, and board floors laid, so all they had to do, was move in. Most of them spent the next day in shaking down and asked if the dust was always blowing as bad as it was then. When being told that they would wish for dust when the rain started, they looked at each other as much to say, "What kind of a place is this?"³

It was not too long before the new arrivals were busily at work. Instruction in signal panels and message pick-up was given to the pilots, flight personnel were instructed in the use of the aviation ordinance, and all hands received familiarization with the Thompson sub-machine gun which was being used at the field guard posts. On the 21st, the first contact with a Sandinista group occurred when a plane on patrol attacked and dispersed a group of "outlaws" at Tuma.

Aviation operations in Nicaragua were carried out under extremely trying conditions. The terrain was heavily forested and mountainous, with elevations reaching 6,000 to 7,000 feet. The significant meteorological characteristic of the region was an eight-month-long rainy season which featured severe

Although VO-6M had a primary mission to provide aerial observation support to the 2d Brigade in Nicaragua, it operated the Curtiss F8C-1 Falcon in an all-purpose role. (Soon after its introduction into service the Falcon was redesignated the OC-1.)

National Archives and Records Service Photo NH71624



U.S. Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

The squadron's pioneering use of transport aircraft for resupply in Nicaragua inspired this painting by LtCol Albert M. "Mike" Leahy, USMCR (Ret.).

thunderstorms. There were few landing fields, and open spaces for forced landings were almost nonexistent. Further, because flight operations were conducted over territory controlled by the rebels, downed crewmen literally faced life or death escape situations.⁴

Marine Corps ground operations in Nicaragua were conducted under equally difficult conditions. A crude trail network which became nearly impassable during the rainy season, lack of radio communications, and the wide dispersal of troops made aviation support indispensable. VO-6M provided much of this support by flying a variety of missions.

Using its initial complement of three Curtiss F8C-1 "Falcon" biplanes, it conducted visual reconnaissance, aerial photography, infantry liaison, emergency resupply, and light attack. The latter task commonly took the form of strafing and bombing attacks in advance of foot patrols, an example of the close air support which had been developing in Nicaragua since the VO-7M dive-bombing attack at Ocotal the previous July.⁵

VO-6M was also assigned transport aircraft in Nicaragua. Using three Atlantic TA-1 three-engine monoplanes and an Atlantic TA-2, the squadron pioneered aerial resupply on a new, large scale.⁶

The success of VO-6M's air transport mission, in fact, provided some of the rationale behind plans to "transfer" the squadron's colors back to Quantico.

The Commandant's request for approval of the administrative movement (i.e., on paper only) of Marine Utility Squadron 6 (VJ-6M) to Nicaragua and the "return" of VO-6M to Quantico was based on the large amount of utility flying being done by transports in Nicaragua. There was also a requirement for an additional squadron at Quantico which could provide training in two-place planes for pilots who would later go to Nicaragua as replacements.⁷ The Chief of Naval Operations accepted the justifications presented, and on 1 September 1928, VO-6M and VJ-6M "exchanged" locations.⁸

With the colors of VO-6M again at Quantico, the squadron became involved with a variety of tasks in the ensuing years. The most important task it performed was the training of new pilots, and in this regard it not only trained regular Marine Corps pilots but it also conducted a school of advanced flying and basic line duty for reserve officers. The squadron also sponsored an aviation mechanics course for voluntary attendees.

Other tasks carried out by the squadron were of a more diverse nature. Flight demonstrations were provided for the Field Officers Class of the Marine Corps Schools. Simulated combat air support was given to an expeditionary brigade conducting a series of landing operations on the Potomac River. These operations were closely related to the squadron's military missions. On the other hand, mosquito dusting around Quantico in support of the Post Sanitary Department and flying daily fire patrols in cooperation with the Virginia Forest Service were a

little less militarily oriented, but provided both helpful service to the community and good flight practice to the pilots. One final mission which attained a degree of routine as well as minor importance was the delivery of the President's mail to his camp at Rapidan, Virginia.⁹

The number and types of aircraft possessed by VO-6M after its "return" to Quantico was varied, but until September 1930 the most versatile of these had been the Vought O2U-1 "Corsair" observation biplane. A tandem, two-seated aircraft, the Corsair carried one forward firing machine gun, and could be fitted with additional guns and bomb racks. Capable of operating from land bases or carriers, floats could also be installed to make the aircraft amphibious.¹⁰

In October 1930, the squadron upgraded its aircraft inventory with the acceptance of the Curtiss F8C-5 "Helldiver" (later redesignated the O2C-1). An improved model of the Falcon aircraft used by VO-6M in Nicaragua, the Helldiver was built for observation duties but possessed excellent dive-bombing characteristics as well.¹¹ The combination of aircraft capabilities, aircrew dive-bombing experiences in Nicaragua, and national enthusiasm with aviation in the 1930s inspired one of the most colorful periods in the history of VO-6M when the unit became involved in a series of Marine Corps public relations events at various air races and airport openings. The squadron organized a six-plane flight demonstration team which by 20 February 1931 made its debut at the opening of the airport at New

After its return to Quantico, VO-6M used a variety of aircraft. Pictured on the left is the Curtiss OC-2 Falcon. The aircraft on the right is the Vought O2U-1 Corsair.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 517612



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 517620





(Marine Corps Aviation Museum)

Squadron personnel and aircraft are lined up for inspection prior to their participation at the Canadian Air Pageant. Note the "Acey-Duecy" paint scheme on the cowling and vertical stabilizers of the squadron's F8C-5 Helldivers (later redesignated the O2C-1).

Bern, North Carolina. Calling themselves the Helldivers to go along with both the name of the plane they were flying as well as some of the maneuvers they were featuring, they impressed spectators so favorably that by 1932 they were representing the Marine Corps at major events such as the Canadian Air Pageant in Montreal and the U.S. National Air Races in Cleveland. In order to enhance their demonstrations VO-6M was expanded to a nine plane unit, the aircraft were attractively painted, special clothing was issued to the ground crews, and all the pilots were given special training in "ground strafing and light bombing" tactics.* As can be envisioned, the squadron provided quite a show—but it was based on tactical flying rather than theatrics. The demonstrations received wide publicity through favorable press notices, a live radio broadcast, and even national showing on movie newsreels.¹²

However, just as times had been opportune for VO-6M to become a unique, highly visible organization, it was also external circumstances which ended the first chapter in the squadron's history. The Marine Corps had the mission of defending advanced bases, and to better accomplish this mission the Commandant had recommended that a twelve-

plane light-bombing squadron be incorporated into the 1934 Naval Aeronautical Organization.¹³ The Chief of Naval Operations accepted the recommendation, but no increase in total Marine Corps squadrons was authorized. The addition of a Marine bombing squadron would require the disestablishment of some other Marine squadron, and it was determined that the Marine Corps could most afford to "lose" an observation squadron.¹⁴

At midnight on 30 June 1933, VO-6M was disbanded and disappeared from the active Marine Corps rolls.**

World War II and China Service

The requirement to provide Marine divisions engaged in combat in the Pacific with critically need-

**The Naval Appropriations Bill of 1929 provided the means for the Marine Corps to institute a five-year program to revive its aging Reserve aviation organization. One feature of the plan called for the establishment of two reserve divisions which would augment VO-6M to wartime strength should mobilization occur. In 1932 a reserve division (VO-6MR) was established, at Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, New York, remaining there until 1 July 1935, when its designation was changed to VO-2MR. In conjunction with this VO-7MR, which was located at the Naval Reserve Aviation Base, World-Chamberlain Airport, Minneapolis, Minnesota, was redesignated VO-6MR. In 1937 all observation squadrons were redesignated as scouting squadrons and VO-6MR became VMS-6R.

*It should be noted that VO-6M was augmented by pilots from all of the squadrons at Quantico for these large airshows.

ed aerial observation and artillery spotting capabilities lead to the authorization of a new breed of observation squadron in 1943.* Recognizing the Army's success with the direct assignment of light observation aircraft to field artillery battalions, the Marine Corps decided to do something along similar lines. The Marines' new observation squadrons were to be attached to artillery units for tactical control, but were to remain in the marine aircraft wing for administrative control.

Marine Observation Squadron 6 (now VMO-6) was reactivated on 20 November 1944, at the U. S. Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico, Virginia. On activation the unit had a strength of eight officers and 26 enlisted men under the temporary command of First Lieutenant Thomas G. Alderson. Alderson commanded the squadron for only a few days until Captain Donald R. Garrett arrived and assumed command on 23 November 1944.

The squadron's primary mission was to conduct aerial observation and artillery direction, and because both the mission and aircraft type were new the squadron officers were chosen at random from fighter, dive bomber, bomber, and transport squadron pilots. Reporting to Quantico for duty, they underwent intensive training in aircraft familiarization, small field landings and take offs, aerial observation and photography, and artillery spotting procedures. Further, they were given orientations on artillery unit organizational structure and equipment, as well as ground unit tactics. The pilots trained in the OY-1 "Sentinel," a two-seat, single-wing light observation and liaison aircraft.** The OY-1, built by the Stinson Aircraft Division of the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, had an aluminum and wood framework with fabric covering and was powered by a 185-horsepower Lycoming O-435-1 six-cylinder, horizontally opposed, air-cooled engine. The plane had a maximum airspeed of 129 miles per hour and an altitude ceiling of 15,800 feet.¹⁶

The squadron remained at Quantico and continued training until 26 December 1944, when it left for the west coast. On New Year's Day 1945, VMO-6

arrived at the Marine Corps Air Depot, Camp Miramar, San Diego, California, and was assigned to Marine Fleet Air, West Coast. On 25 January VMO-6 was transferred to Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (AirFMFPac) for administrative purposes and to the 6th Marine Division for operational control. The same day, all hands of VMO-6, eight officers and 29 enlisted men, boarded the attack transport USS *Renville* (APA 227) and sailed for the Solomon Islands the next morning. The *Renville* crossed the equator on 8 February and the traditional ritual of initiating all "pollywogs" into the Order of the Golden Dragon and the Ancient Order of the Deep was strictly observed.***

The *Renville*, with VMO-6 on board, arrived at Guadalcanal on 10 February 1945, and the squadron was operationally attached to the 15th Marines of the 6th Marine Division. During the squadron's stay at Guadalcanal there were no aircraft available for flight training, so while the officers remained ashore the enlisted men were put on board the attack cargo ship USS *Caswell* (AKA 72) as part of the ship's platoon and took part in training maneuvers.

VMO-6 joined the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing in March, and on 8 March, Technical Sergeant Glenn R. Hunter, a naval aviation pilot and member of VMO-6, received and accepted a commission to second lieutenant. Two days later, Hunter and the other officers of VMO-6 boarded air transportation and departed for Ulithi Atoll in the Caroline Islands. The long flight required overnight stops at Manus Island in the Admiralties, and the island of Peleliu in the Palau Islands. The officers finally reached Ulithi Atoll on 12 March and waited for the remainder of the squadron.

The enlisted Marines of the squadron, still on board the *Caswell*, departed Guadalcanal on 15 March to rendezvous with the officers who had been split up and berthed on five different aircraft carriers.**** With the arrival of the *Caswell* at Ulithi Atoll on 21 March, the squadron was finally in the same general location, but still on board different ships. Their respective ships left together for the

*Until the creation of these new light aviation units, the closest approximation the Marine Corps had to an observation squadron was the photographic fighter squadron (VMF(P)).¹⁵

**The Consolidated OY series and later the Cessna OE series of observation aircraft were commonly, although incorrectly, referred to as "Grasshoppers," a name only properly used in conjunction with the Piper NE/HE/AE series of aircraft.

***A "pollywog" is one of several names used to describe those personnel who have not crossed the equator on a naval ship and been initiated to commemorate the occasion. Once the ceremony is over a "pollywog" becomes a "shellback."

****The five escort carriers (CVEs) which shared in the transport of the pilots and their aircraft were: USS *Petrof Bay*, USS *Rudyard Bay*, USS *Tulagi*, USS *Saginaw Bay*, and the USS *Chenango*.¹⁷

Ryukyu Islands as part of the convoy for the assault on the Japanese island of Okinawa.

L-Day for the assault on Okinawa was 1 April 1945. The landing force commander, Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, USA, employed the Marines' III Amphibious Corps (III AC) and the Army's XXIV Corps as the northern and southern landing forces of his Tenth Army. III AC, commanded by Major General Roy S. Geiger, had the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions for maneuvering elements. On L-Day the two corps landed abreast on Okinawa's western beaches near Hagushi. Meeting no opposition they pushed rapidly inland, and captured their primary L-Day objectives of Yontan and Kadena airfields. The capture of these airfields permitted the early use of land-based air.

Launching from the CVEs on L + 1, VMO-6 aircrews flew to Yontan airfield and began operations.* Command relations were different than originally planned, in that III AC Artillery took operational control of VMO-6 from the 6th Marine Division due to the failure of VMO-7, the squadron originally assigned to III AC Artillery, to arrive in time for the landing.¹⁸ Even so, squadron flight operations were generally in support of the 6th Division. VMO-6 aircraft were also used by the pilots of VMO-2 to support the 1st Marine Division.¹⁹

The squadron flew artillery spotting, reconnaissance, message delivery, wire laying, and general utility missions. Most of the flights were flown over enemy territory at altitudes of 2,000 feet or less, placing the pilots and aerial observers under frequent fire from antiaircraft batteries and small arms.**

Exposure to hostile fire was aggravated during the initial stages of the operation due to coordination problems caused by lack of a central agency for authorizing flights. In the confusion, the squadron made several unauthorized flights on which aircraft were hit by enemy fire while loitering over enemy territory waiting for mission assignments.

*The carrier launches represented the first flying the VMO-6 pilots had done since leaving the states. Happily, the OY's short take-off characteristics and the CVE's ability to provide optimum launch conditions made for an uneventful operation.²⁰

**The aerial observers (AOs) were ground officers assigned from artillery regiments, not from aviation squadrons. The AOs usually logged as many flight hours as the pilots, because the majority of VMO tasks called for joint pilot/AO participation.

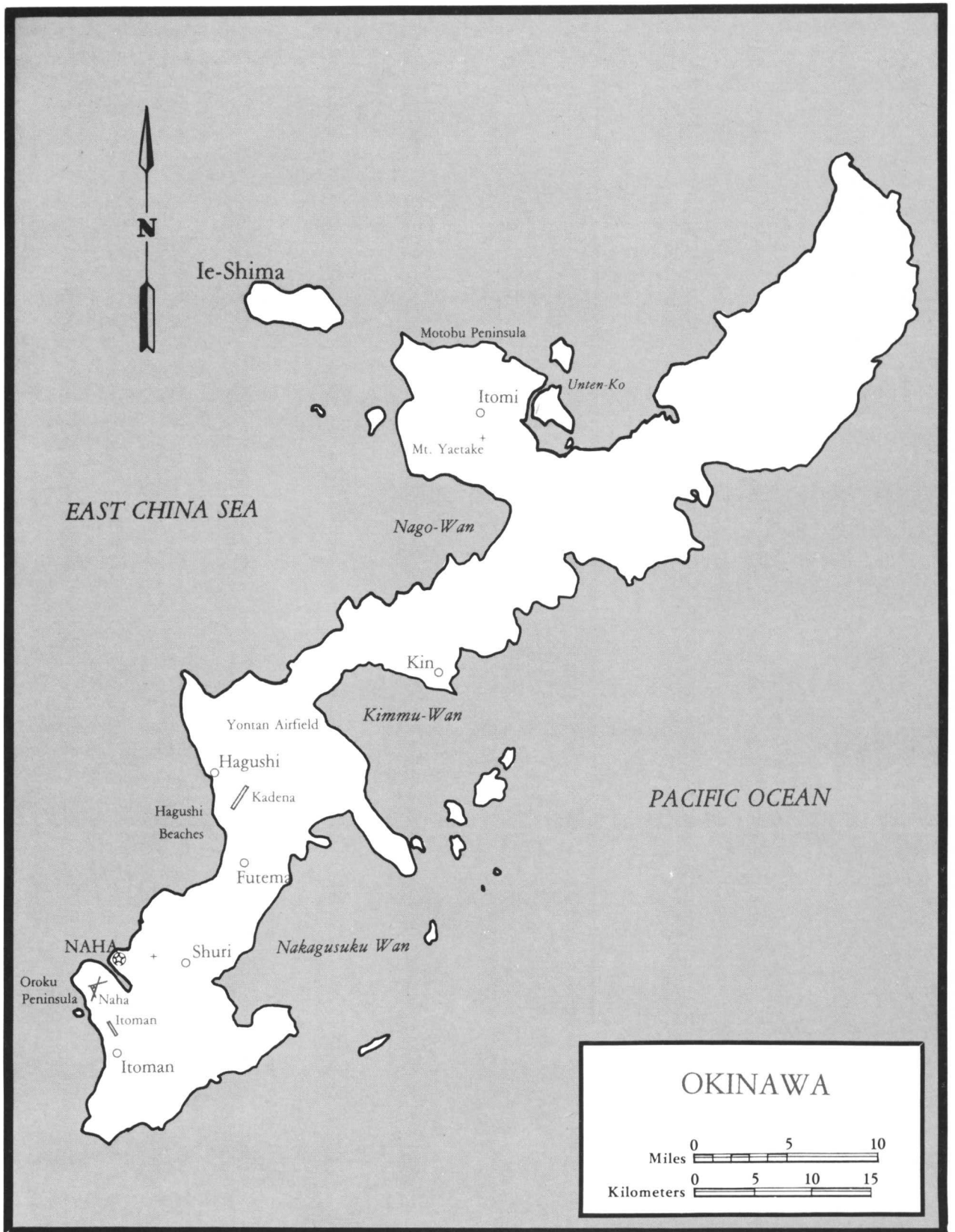


Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 123728

During the Okinawa campaign squadron aircraft operated from the crudest of "airstrips." Here an OY-1 takes off from a road near the front lines.

During the month of April the squadron lost three Marines. Private Richard J. O'Donnell was wounded in action during a Japanese daylight bombing raid on 6 April, and died two hours later from multiple shrapnel wounds. On 8 April, Second Lieutenant Emanuel Moyses and his observer, First Lieutenant John R. Parsons, were shot down by enemy machine gun fire while directing artillery fire over Motobu Peninsula, and on 10 April, Second Lieutenant Charles Hanmer was forced down while on an artillery mission over Motobu Peninsula when a sudden rainstorm moved in from the China Sea restricting visibility. During his last radio communication, Hanmer reported he was lost, running out of fuel, and going down at sea. A radio bearing of Hanmer's position was taken by the ground station at Kadena and Air-Sea Rescue started a search at once. No trace of Hanmer or his aircraft was found. Also lost was First Lieutenant James L. Frink, an aerial observer from the 15th Marines. With the losses of Moyses, Hanmer, and O'Donnell, the squadron was down to 7 officers, 27 enlisted men, and 7 serviceable OY-1s.

In May the squadron's operations shifted to the southern portion of the island when the landing force commander ordered III AC to swing south in order to permit a two corps abreast assault on the stiff Japanese defenses along the Shuri-Naha line.





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 123727

In addition to acting as the "eyes of the artillery", the squadron was also important because of the medical evacuation services it carried out.

The squadron's aircraft situation continued to grow worse when Second Lieutenants Lester E. Bartels and James L. Morris were forced down due to aircraft engine failures. Both pilots were rescued but their aircraft were lost.

The OYs were grounded on 25 May in order to give engine factory representatives and squadron maintenance personnel an opportunity to determine the cause of the failures. Finally, one of the squadron's maintenance men found the problem. Lint from Chamois cloth being used to filter fuel during refueling operations had been clogging the aircraft carburetors. By 7 June all the carburetors had been cleaned, and the squadron was able to resume flight operations.

In June VMO-6 also began making medical evacuation flights. During one two-day period, 17-18 June, the squadron had only three aircraft flying, but managed to evacuate 94 wounded besides maintaining other normal combat support flights. For their work in carrying out these medical evacuations, many of which occurred during the hours of darkness, VMO-6 received a letter of commendation from the Commanding General, III Amphibious Corps.

The spotting mission, at least in the view of the artillery commanders, was the squadron's most

valuable contribution. The importance of this mission was best described by the III AC Artillery G-3, Colonel Frederick P. Henderson. He wrote:

If there was any group of indispensable officers in III AC Artillery on Okinawa, it was our air spotters. The nature of the terrain in southern Okinawa seriously limited ground observation—especially while we were fighting our way uphill on the Shuri massif. Without our AOs [Aerial Observers], III AC Artillery would have been blind.²¹

Colonel Henderson also noted that the Japanese recognized their best defense against the threat posed by VMO artillery direction was concealment. Thus, by lengthening the operating hours of the observation squadrons to the extent that their missions commenced with launches before daylight and ended with landings after dark, the VMOs were able to provide an extremely cheap form of suppression and interdiction.²²

The primacy of the squadron's artillery spotting mission and its operational attachment to ground organizations made it somewhat akin to an "orphan" with regard to the supply support it received from its parent aviation headquarters. It lived and fought with ground units, and it had little or no connection with what the rest of Marine aviation was doing. As a result, III AC Artillery and the divisional artillery regiment (15th Marines) provided the squadron with most of its non-aviation peculiar supply support. The squadron also learned to adapt to its status by becoming skillful in the art of "scrounging"²³

During the Okinawa campaign squadron aircraft sustained substantial antiaircraft and small arms fire, but battle damage, as well as the normal mechanical difficulties associated with flight operations, were overcome by maintenance crews working long, hard hours. The squadron, while flying a total of 460 combat missions and evacuating 195 seriously wounded men, compiled an impressive 904 flight hours.²⁴

With the end of the battle, VMO-6 began packing its equipment and crating its aircraft to board shipping for another campaign. On 6 July all personnel and equipment boarded the attack transport USS *Bollinger* (APA 234) and two days later sailed for Guam in the Marianas. They arrived on 14 July and were assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 21, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, on 25 July 1945.

With the capitulation of the Japanese in September, the squadron underwent an unusually

²¹To conduct night operations trucks were used to light the runways for take-offs and landings.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332834

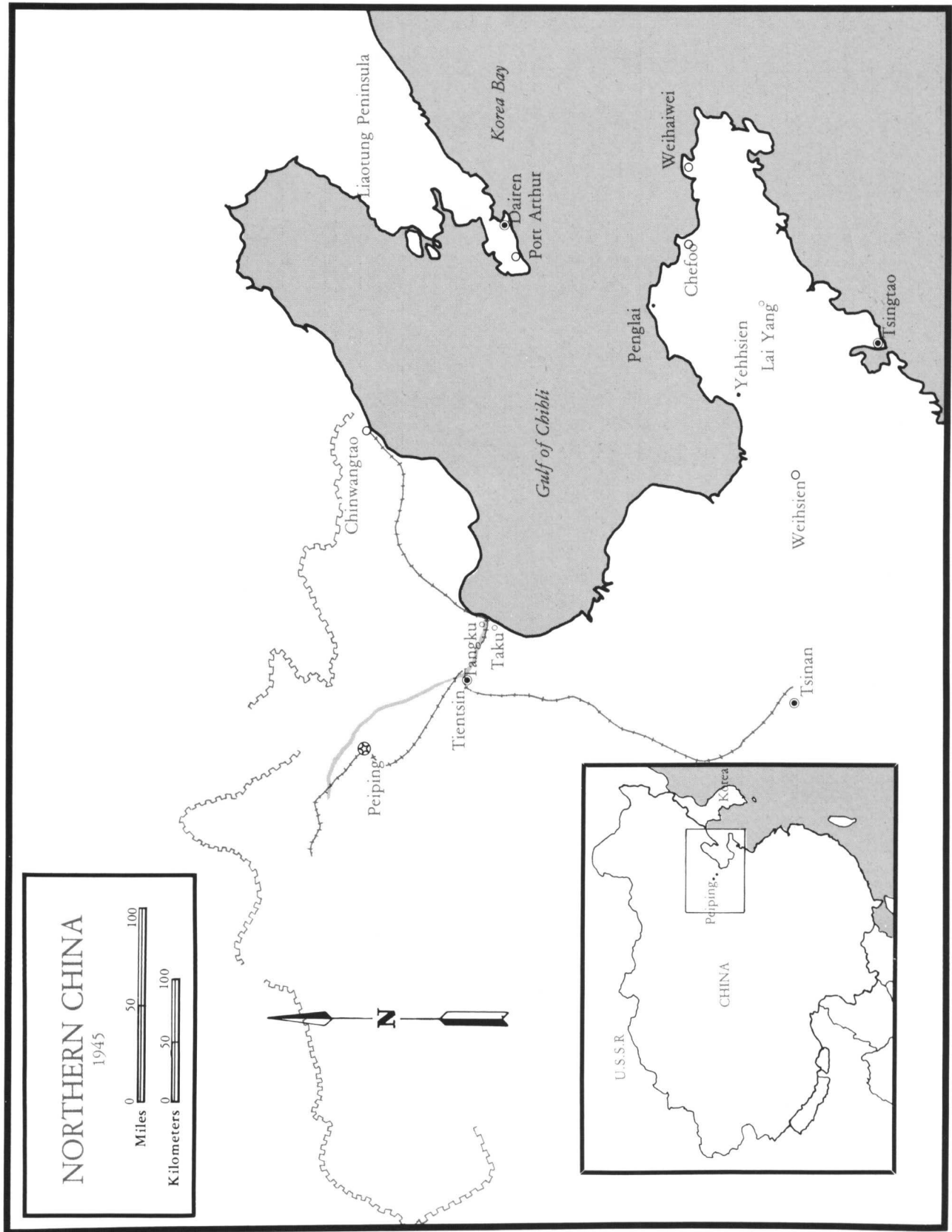
With the Okinawa campaign behind them, squadron personnel posed for this group photograph on Guam in July 1945. By October, VMO-6 was serving in Tsingtao, China.

large turnover of personnel. The majority of the original officers and men who had left the United States with the squadron in January 1945, returned home for reassignment. Among them was Captain Donald R. Garrett, VMO-6's commanding officer, who had been relieved by Captain Joe W. Fitts, Jr. on 16 September.

A gradual migration from Guam by VMO-6 personnel started on 24 September 1945, when 13 officers and three enlisted men departed on board the escort carrier USS *Bougainville* (CVE 100) for Okinawa. Three days later, 31 enlisted men, with squadron equipment, under the command of First Lieutenant Robert C. Gutknecht, boarded the transport USS *Anne Arundel* (AP 76) and left Guam on 2 October. The officers and enlisted men on board the *Bougainville* arrived at Okinawa on 27 September, but departed the next day to evade a typhoon. On 2 October, after the typhoon had passed, the *Bougainville* returned to Okinawa. Five days later these officers and men once again left Okinawa, finally reaching their destination, Tsingtao, China, on 11 October. The remainder of the squadron, on board the *Anne Arundel*, joined them the same day. On 12 October 1945, the squadron flew its aircraft off the *Bougainville* and landed at Tsingtao Airport, its new home. The Marines on board the *Anne Arundel* began unloading the squadron's equipment and transporting it to Tsingtao.

VMO-6 now had 14 officers and 34 enlisted men. Its primary duty consisted of flying patrol missions from Tsingtao to Lai-Yang, Wei-Hsien, and Po-li-Chen to report troop movements of the Chinese Communists; it also performed rescue missions when necessary. On 13 October, Second Lieutenant Wayne Morse and Second Lieutenant James L Morris rescued a Navy pilot from the aircraft carrier USS *Boxer* (CVS 21), who had been forced down about 50 miles north of Tsingtao. The squadron also assisted in salvaging the Navy airplane. On 20 October, VMO-6 was reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 32, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. Several days later, Morse and Morris picked up an injured pilot and gunner of a SB2C Helldiver which had crashed about one mile from the airfield after take-off, and returned them to the airfield for medical treatment.

The squadron continued to observe and report the activities of the Chinese armies for the next seven months. In May 1946 VMO-6 received verbal orders to prepare for transfer to the United States. On 4 May the squadron was transferred to MAG-25, but on 10 May it was reassigned to MAG-32. Because of the increased activities of the Chinese Communist Army, VMO-6 was ordered to remain in China indefinitely. On 18 May, the squadron was again transferred to MAG-25 for administrative purposes, but came under the operational control of the 3d Marine Brigade. The squadron was now commanded



by Captain Richard B. Cropley who relieved Captain Edward S. John. John had taken over the squadron on 15 December 1945 from Captain Fitts. Another change occurred on 1 June when the squadron was transferred administratively from MAG-25 to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, but with operational control remaining with the 3d Marine Brigade.

By May 1946, VMO-6 pilots were consistently taking small arms fire on their observation and patrol flights from Communist troops. The squadron maintained 11 OY-1 aircraft, but four were out of operation because of a shortage of aircraft parts.

On 11 July VMO-6 was given an emergency mission of evacuating Communication Group Team 21 of Executive Headquarters, Peiping, China, consisting of two Army officers, a civilian interpreter, and four enlisted men. The team was stationed at Kaomi, Shantung Province, approximately 65 miles west of Tsingtao, and, because of the Chinese Communists' advances, had been completely cut off from all but radio communication with its supply point at Tsingtao. Marine aircraft from Tsingtao succeeded in bringing the team vital supplies, but these flights could not be conducted safely because of inadequate landing facilities at Kaomi. Evacuation of the team by truck convoy was precluded because of destroyed bridges and unfordable rivers, and it was decided to use small planes to lift out the team members and their light equipment.

VMO-6 was assigned the mission. Landing at a small athletic field, the squadron made 17 lifts into Kaomi over a period of seven hours, and successfully evacuated the team. In a letter of appreciation, the chairman of the team, Army Colonel Phillip C. Wilders, stated that the VMO-6 pilots, "... displayed coolness, judgement, and flying skill beyond that normally to be expected."

After the evacuation of Team 21 the Communist offensive subsided in the Tsingtao area and the need for observation patrols diminished to the point where the squadron was flying only two missions per week. On 15 October 1946, VMO-6 moved to Marine Air Base One, Tientsin, China, and on 13 December the squadron ceased all flight operations in preparation for departure to the United States. Captain Harold F. Brown assumed the post of commanding officer on 13 December.

The squadron was transferred on 20 December to the 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Reinforced), FMF. On 3 January 1947, VMO-6 boarded the attack transport USS *Chilton* (APA 38) and left for home, arriving at San Diego, California, on 22 January.

The squadron was stationed at the airstrip at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, California, and was reassigned to Marine Air, West Coast.

In the spring of 1947, VMO-6 received the additional duty of working with Post Malaria Control at Camp Pendleton, and one plane began spraying DDT on all mosquito-infested areas in the camp. The unsafe areas were sprayed twice weekly during spring, summer, and fall months. On 15 July 1947, First Lieutenant Albert C. Beneke was killed when his aircraft crashed and burned in Sandia Canyon near Fallbrook, California, during a DDT spraying mission. Memorial services were held at Camp Pendleton on 18 July.

Operational control of VMO-6 was transferred, on 16 July, to the 1st Marine Division. The division had just arrived at Camp Pendleton and very few field problems, involving VMO-6, were conducted until the division had a chance to adjust to its new home. On 1 October, the squadron's designation changed from VMO-6, Marine Air, West Coast to VMO-6, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force.

The spray flights were interrupted during the first week of November when the fabric of the spray plane became saturated with DDT. The plane was grounded until new fabric was installed. During 13-14 November, VMO-6 worked in conjunction with the 1st Marine Division on Operation Penny, which consisted of a landing on Alliso Canyon Beach and a drive inland to the airstrip at Camp Pendleton. The OY-type airplanes, flown by VMO-6, were used as observation planes spotting the movements of enemy forces. On 10 February 1948, VMO-6 participated in the 1st Marine Division Operation 1-48. During the evening of the 10th, VMO-6 was called upon to search for five amphibian tractors which had been swamped while attempting an emergency landing in the surf at Oceanside. Keeping two planes constantly in the air throughout the day, the squadron found four of the five lost tractors.

On 29 March, an OY was specially rigged for spraying DDT and the regular spraying flights were resumed. Captain Richard B. Cropley began his third tour of duty in VMO-6 as the commanding officer when he relieved Captain Brown on 17 June 1948. The primary duties of VMO-6 continued to be artillery spotting, aerial photography, camouflage study, and message drops and pickups. Administrative missions also increased as the squadron began flying 1st Marine Division officer and enlisted

personnel on official business to areas within the Eleventh Naval District in an effort to save time.

Again on 19 July 1948, the DDT spraying of Camp Pendleton was suspended when the spray plane sustained a damaged wing tip and rudder due to flying into a cable. The pilot was uninjured and made a safe landing. From July to September the squadron was occupied mostly with administrative flights, transportation of personnel, and artillery spotting.

On 1 October 1948, VMO-6 left in two echelons to participate in an amphibious exercise along the southern California coast. The ground echelon departed for Seal Beach, California, and boarded the tank landing ship (LST) 1146. The flight echelon left for Naval Air Station, San Diego, California, and hoisted its planes on board the USS *Boxer* (CV 21). The squadron's planes were to be launched on 8 October in support of the amphibious landing, but heavy fog prevented the scheduled launch and the *Boxer* returned to San Diego. The aircraft were then unloaded and flown to a small emergency airstrip near the beachhead on 9 October. Meanwhile, the ground echelon had off-loaded from the LST and was waiting when the aircraft and their crews finally arrived. Operational flights in support of the exercise began immediately and observers from the 1st Marine Division were flown to observe and report the frontline activities and direct simulated artillery fire. The operation ended on 10 October and the squadron returned to Camp Pendleton to resume its normal operations. On 20 October, Major Robert G. Howie replaced Captain Cropley as the commanding officer.

Two officers, five enlisted men, and two aircraft from VMO-6 took part in Operation Micowex 49-A held in Kodiak, Alaska, during the period 8-14 February 1949. A total of 21 hours were flown by the two aircraft under cold weather conditions. On 14 February Captain William C. Benton and First Lieutenant Edward P. Stamford took off from Kodiak, Alaska, in two OY aircraft and landed on board the *Boxer* while it was anchored in the harbor. This is believed to be the first time that an OY type aircraft had landed on an aircraft carrier. The small detachment returned home on 5 March 1949.

During the next several months VMO-6 worked with the 1st Marine Division on several field problems in which it practiced radio communication and flew camouflage detection flights; it also controlled simulated air strikes and spotted for the ar-

tillery. The squadron also continued its DDT spraying of the infested areas of Camp Pendleton.

Korea and the Advent of Helicopters

The prospect of peace for America was shattered on 25 June 1950, when seven infantry divisions and an armored division of the North Korean People's Army invaded the Republic of Korea. Although the U.S. had no treaty obligation to help defend the Republic of Korea, there were many moral and pragmatic reasons to do so. Equally as important, the United Nations, in a series of Security Council meetings, called for a collective effort to support the Republic of Korea against the North Korean aggression.*

The United States began providing military support to South Korea on 30 June 1950, when President Harry S. Truman authorized the Commander in Chief, Far East (CinCFE), General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, to use American forces to oppose any further North Korean advances.²⁷

Anticipating the use of Marines in the rapidly deteriorating Korean situation, units in the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing were given warning orders to prepare for movement overseas. Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California, became hubs of pre-deployment activity. Major Vincent J. Gottschalk, who had assumed command of VMO-6 on 3 July, was ordered to prepare a detachment of four officers and 10 enlisted men for deployment. The squadron was busily engaged in outfitting the detachment when the order was changed to include the whole unit.

*The United States' involvement in Korea was a result of the political vacuum created by the defeat of Japan in World War II. As early as the Cairo Conference of 1943 the United States had supported the concept of a free and independent Korea, and at the Yalta Conference in 1945 Russia informally agreed to the idea. After the Japanese surrender, the United States and Russia jointly occupied Korea, with the 38th parallel serving as a temporary demarcation line. The joint occupation was supposed to offer the Koreans a period of transition during which they could develop the skills and experience necessary for self-government. It soon became apparent, however, that Russia was opposed to a united, independent Korea. The 38th Parallel became a political boundary. In 1948 U.S. trusteeship in Korea ended when a national assembly, elected under United Nations supervision, established the Republic of Korea. Russia refused to participate in the elections, and that portion of Korea under her occupation was formed into a separate, Communist state, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea.²⁶

On 7 July 1950, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was activated in response to General MacArthur's request for the immediate dispatch of a Marine regimental combat team with supporting air. The brigade was built around the reinforced 5th Marines and Marine Aircraft Group 33. Brigadier General Edward A. Craig was designated the brigade commander.

In task organizing for the new air-ground team, operational control of VMO-6 was passed from the 1st Marine Division to the brigade, while administrative control and logistic support of the squadron became the responsibility of MAG-33.

Preparations for operations in Korea were also under way on the east coast. Headquarters Marine Corps ordered Marine Helicopter Squadron 1 (HMX-1), located at Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico, Virginia, to detach eight officers and 30 enlisted men to El Toro, for service with the brigade.²⁸ This was the first permanent assignment of helicopter qualified pilots and maintenance personnel to the Fleet Marine Force.*

Upon arrival in California, most members of the HMX-1 cadre were assigned to VMO-6. Captain Victor A. Armstrong, the detachment's senior officer, was made the squadron executive officer.**

VMO-6's personnel strength had expanded to 10 officers and 64 enlisted men with the augmentation of the HMX-1 personnel, however, the acquisition of aircraft and spare parts remained a problem. Major Gottschalk's solution to the problem of having four serviceable OYs was to take along eight OYs with a view to using four of them for parts when needed.²⁹ Meanwhile, because HMX-1 had only transferred personnel, the squadron had to acquire helicopters from sources on the west coast. Within the week, with the cooperation of naval authorities, they had picked up six Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopters: two each from the Inyokern and Point Mugu naval airbases, and two from the overhaul and repair facility in San Diego. Further, almost all the HO3S-1 spare parts on the east coast were placed on priority requisition for delivery before the scheduled sailing date.³⁰

The HO3S-1 was a four-seat, observation-utility helicopter built by Sikorsky, with a three-bladed main rotor system which was powered by a



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A4468

The Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopter performed yeoman service for VMO-6 in Korea. Note the makeshift manner in which a litter patient had to be carried in the aircraft's passenger compartment.

450-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-985 Wasp Jr., nine-cylinder, radial-cooled engine. It could carry 1,250 pounds and cruise at 85 miles per hour. The pilot sat in the front center and a bench-style seat aft of the pilot accommodated three passengers.³¹ Despite its observation designation, the HO3S-1 was used for a variety of roles. It was not, however, well suited for what may have been its most important mission, medical evacuation.*** Additionally, it lacked instrumentation and lighting for night flying.

On 13 July, four OYs were flown from Camp Pendleton to North Island Naval Air Station near San Diego, where they and the helicopters were hoisted on board the escort carrier USS *Badoeng Strait* (CVE 116). The remainder of the squadron personnel and its equipment also embarked on the 13th. At 1000 the next day, the *Badoeng Strait*, overloaded with aircraft and personnel, sailed from San Diego. While at sea, a VMO-6 helicopter supported the task force by delivering guard mail and passengers from ship to ship. The commanding officer of the *Badoeng Strait* found additional missions for the VMO-6 helicopter and soon it was exchanging movie films regularly and carrying a chaplain from ship to ship for divine services.

The *Badoeng Strait* docked at Kobe, Japan, at 2000 on 31 July. The OY aircraft were unloaded by hoist, but the helicopters remained on board over-

* Appendix F provides a list of these pioneering Marines.

**Captain Victor A. Armstrong attained the rank of major general.

***In order to carry a non-ambulatory patient in the HO3S-1, due to its interior configuration, the rear right hand window had to be removed and the stretcher case loaded head first through the window and across the passenger compartment. During the flight the patients' feet remained outside the helicopter.³²

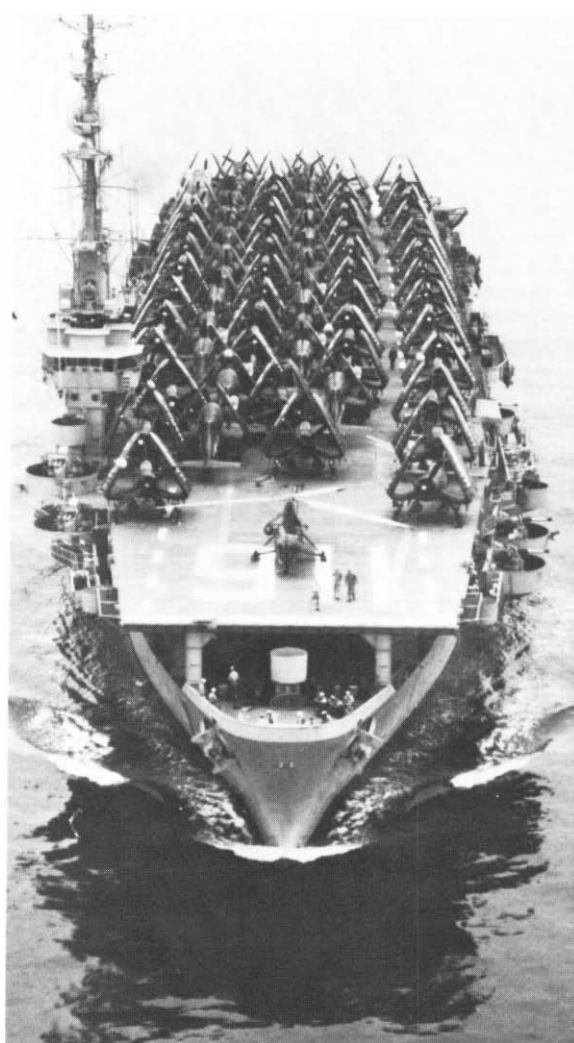
night. The next morning the helicopters were flown off the carrier to a nearby vacant lot where they underwent thorough maintenance inspections. Meanwhile, the OYs took off from a narrow street and flew to Itami, Japan, and from there to Ashiya, Japan. After the completion of their inspections, the slower helicopters took off and proceeded to Itami, and from there to Iwakuni, Japan, where they stayed overnight.* The squadron's rear echelon remained behind to assemble the equipment and later boarded a Japanese LST for Pusan, Korea.

The helicopter and OY sections temporarily rejoined in Ashiya on 2 August. At Ashiya a joint briefing was received, and after the briefing the aircrews regrouped into helicopter and OY flights, taking off for Pusan the same day. Upon arrival in Korea the forward echelon was billeted in a Korean school house with Army and Air Force personnel near an airstrip 10 miles west of Pusan.

On 3 August the squadron went to work in Korea by supporting the 1st Brigade's move to Chang-won. The OYs flew convoy escort, artillery spotting, observation, and reconnaissance flights. The helicopters were used for medical evacuation, search and rescue, reconnaissance, and command and control missions. The latter mission was particularly important during those first hectic weeks in Korea because it permitted the brigade commander to make rapid, first hand appraisals of the tactical situation, and to conduct spot conferences with his subordinate commanders.

On 4 August the rear echelon arrived in Pusan and the next day the squadron's supplies and equipment were loaded on a train and moved to Chinhae, a small grass field also used by the Korean Air Force. The remainder of the squadron moved from Pusan to Chinhae on 6 August. The sixth also marked the date of the squadron's first aircraft loss when Master Sergeant Herbert J. Valentine did not return to Chinhae after a mission in an OY aircraft. An extensive search failed to locate either him or his aircraft, but the next day he returned to base. His plane had been shot down over the water and he had been rescued by friendly Koreans.

Resupply operations became an increasingly important support function of the squadron. The mountainous terrain and extreme heat caused the troops to collapse from heat exhaustion if not sup-



National Archives and Record Service Photo 80G416920

VMO-6 departed for combat operations in Korea aboard an overcrowded USS Badoeng Strait on 14 July 1950. The accompanying pack of F4U Corsairs were from VMF-214, VMF-323, and VMF(N)-513.

plied with sufficient water, and supply bearers took hours carrying water and food to the mountain heights. The helicopters and OYs delivered these same supplies in a matter of minutes. Bomb racks were attached to OY wing struts, allowing them to carry five-gallon water cans or rations. The HO3S-1s required no modifications for the mission.

On 8 August, the squadron recorded its first night evacuation. VMO-6 helicopters had already transported six seriously wounded Marines from Chindong-ni to the naval hospital train at Masan, when another emergency evacuation request was received at dusk. Disregarding the night flying

*Two of the squadron's six helicopters as well as two pilots were left at Itami for use by MAG-33/1st MAW (Forward).

limitations of the HO3S-1, Captain Armstrong made the first of more than a thousand night evacuations carried out by the squadron in Korea.

The squadron's helicopter crews continued to be kept busy evacuating wounded Marines from the mountains and rescuing downed pilots. On 10 August, Captain Vivian M. Moses, a VMF-323 fighter pilot flying off the *Badoeng Strait* was shot down and made a forced landing in the water. He was rescued by one of VMO-6's helicopters and remained overnight with the squadron at Chinhae. The next day he returned to his squadron by helicopter. He was killed within a few hours of his return while on another combat mission. A VMO-6 crew recovered Captain Moses' body before the helicopter which had taken him to the *Badoeng Strait* had returned to Chinhae.

On 15 August 1950, the squadron received the two helicopters and two pilots they had previously left with MAG-33 in Japan. The newcomers arrived in time to participate in the first battle of the Naktong River bulge on 17 August. During the battle the helicopters and OYs coordinated on another new mission for the squadron, psychological warfare.

Helicopters transported surrender leaflets to the squadron command post from the rear area, while OYs made aerial delivery of them to the enemy.

On 26 August an OY crashed on a spotting mission over the front lines and the pilot, First Lieutenant Harold J. Davis, was seriously injured. His observer, Second Lieutenant Patrick G. Sivert, sustained less serious injuries. Two helicopters were dispatched to the area, which was under counter-battery fire, to bring them out. The helicopters successfully extracted the injured pilot and his observer and delivered them to the hospital train at Masan. Two days later Davis and Sivert were evacuated to a hospital ship at Pusan. Davis died from his injuries on 6 September.

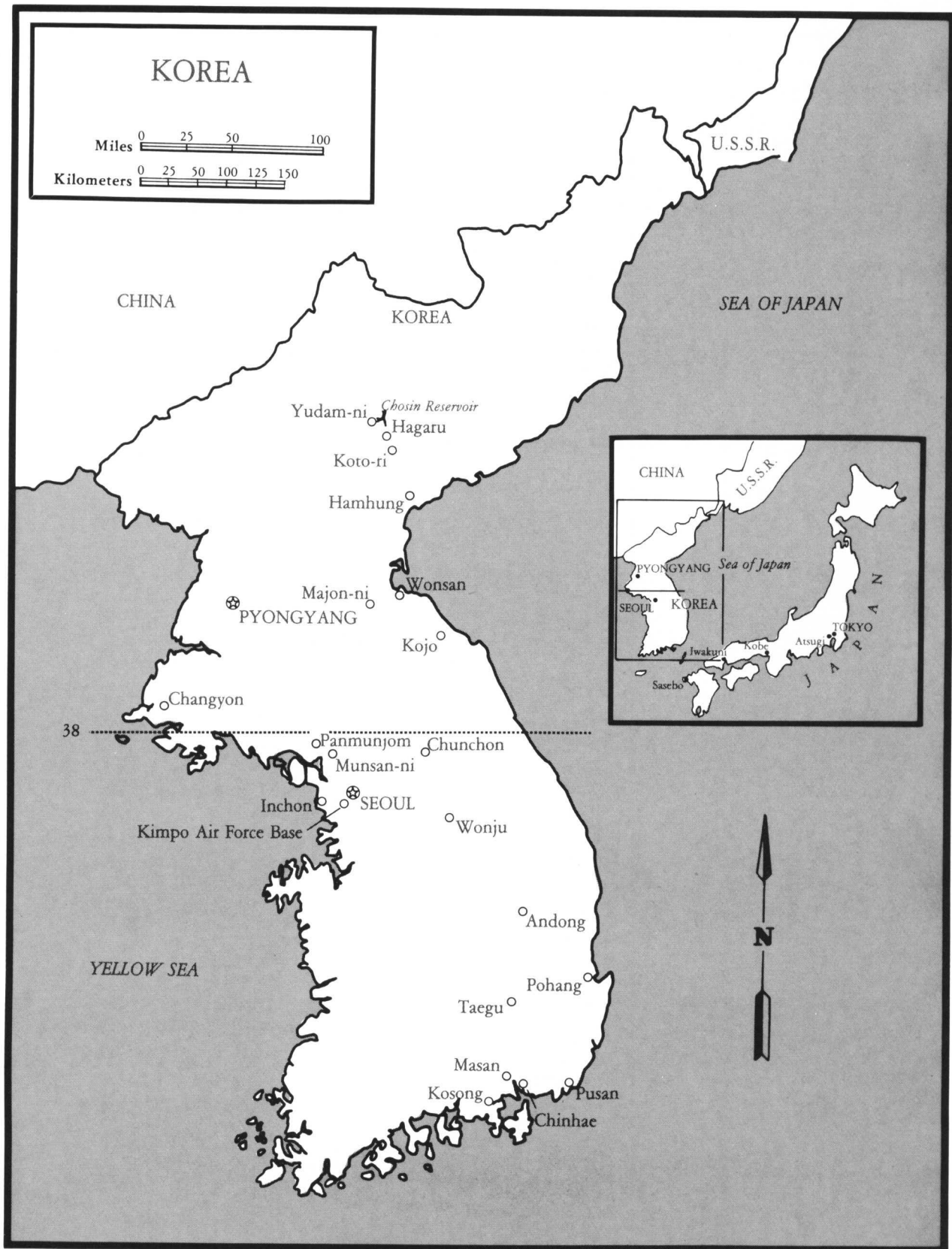
On 9 September 1950, operational control of VMO-6 was transferred from the 1st Brigade to the 1st Marine Division (Reinforced), itself a part of the X Army Corps.

The squadron was scheduled to take part in the Inchon Landing, and because of a scarcity of shipping space the squadron had to be split into two echelons. On 9 September, 10 officers, 48 enlisted men, and 4 helicopters were loaded on board LST Q079 at

Flying above the rugged Korean terrain an OY-1 piloted by Maj Vincent J. Gottschalk carries out a spotting mission. Maj Gottschalk commanded VMO-6 during 1950-51.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A130913





Chinhae, and left for Pusan harbor.* Four officers and 43 enlisted men along with the remainder of the squadron property delayed at Chinhae waiting for follow-on shipping. The forward echelon arrived at Pusan on 10 September and two additional OY aircraft were loaded on board the LST. Additionally, the escort carriers USS *Sicily* (CVE 118) and USS *Badoeng Strait*, were used to transport one OY apiece. After this final bit of loading was completed the task force left Pusan for Inchon.

After the securing of Wolmi-do Island, the assault on Inchon began in earnest in the early evening of 15 September. Flights were not required from VMO-6 during the initial landings at Inchon, but on D + 1 the LST-based helicopters flew reconnaissance missions over Wolmi-do Island. Late in the day a VMO-6 helicopter, piloted by First Lieutenant Max Nebergall, rescued a Navy Corsair pilot downed in Inchon harbor. Routine observation missions were flown by the carrier-based OYs, while rescue, liaison, and evacuation missions were flown by the helicopters. From 16 to 20 September 1950, the squadron command post and its dirt road landing strip were located in the 1st Marine Division headquarters area at Inchon. One squadron OY was destroyed on 18 September while landing at dusk, when the aircraft collided with power lines strung across a road near the approach to the landing strip. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries.

The 1st Marine Division continued to push inland toward Kimpo Airfield and on 18 September, the first landing at Kimpo, the largest airfield in Korea at the time, was made by Captain Armstrong in a VMO-6 helicopter. Captain Armstrong carried Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Commanding General, FMFPac, as his passenger. Two days later VMO-6 moved to Kimpo for operations.

As the enemy was pushed closer to the Han River, resistance stiffened. On 21 September Second Lieutenant Edgar F. Gaudette Jr. and his air observer, Captain Robert E. McClean, parachuted to safety west of Yongdong-Po-Ri after their OY

airplane was shot down by enemy small arms fire. Both Marines received minor injuries. On the same day an HO3S-1 helicopter piloted by First Lieutenant Arthur R. Bancroft was destroyed during an attempt to rescue a downed fighter pilot behind enemy lines.** First Lieutenant Robert A. Longstaff, in another squadron helicopter, later rescued Bancroft, his crew chief, and the fighter pilot. Two days later Captain Armstrong rescued a pilot who had gone down over a hundred miles behind enemy lines.

On 25 September 1950, a VMO-6 helicopter effected a rescue in record-breaking time. A Marine pilot and radar operator of VMF(N)-542 had been downed in a rice paddy 5 miles north of Kimpo.*** The rescue operation, from time of notification until completion, took only 6 minutes.

A more significant action took place that night. A Seventh Fleet helicopter on "loan" to VMO-6 had suffered battle damage while on a deep rescue mission. Unable to make it back to Kimpo, the crew made a precautionary landing in the Han River a few miles out of Seoul. Word was received at the squadron around 2100 that the crew was down in enemy territory, and Captain Armstrong launched to recover them.

Although the HO3S-1 had no landing light, he was able to spot the downed aircraft because of the illumination provided by the burning city of Seoul. Then because he could not use his hoist, he landed his helicopter on a sandbar close to the damaged aircraft. The two crewmen, a Navy ensign and a Marine corporal, swam to the rescuing helicopter and were safely delivered back to base.³⁴

On 26 September, the squadron's rear echelon finally arrived at Inchon. It was a welcome addition. With the enemy retreating from Seoul, targets were readily available and large numbers of enemy troops and equipment were destroyed through air strikes and artillery missions directed by VMO-6 aerial observers. The hard-pressed enemy stiffened his air defense around the city of Seoul with heavier anti-aircraft weapons, and VMO-6's slow moving aircraft

*This LST was contracted from the Japanese, and manned entirely by a Japanese crew. The VMO-6 personnel shared the ship's messing facilities with the crew—many of whom had been members of the Japanese imperial navy only five years earlier. Other aspects of the unusual arrangement included the facts that the Marines had no armament on board nor any communication facilities with the American forces. Fortunately, Captain Armstrong, the detachment officer in charge, spoke fluent Japanese due to his fifteen year residence in Japan prior to World War II.³³

**Bancroft's crew chief had been unable to drag the downed pilot back to the HO3S-1, so Bancroft had to leave the running helicopter to assist. While the crew was away from the aircraft, the helicopter's collective friction device worked loose and the helicopter rolled onto its side.

***The pilot of the VMF(N)-542 aircraft was the squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Max J. Volcansek, Jr.

became lucrative targets. On 29 September, the squadron lost an OY aircraft and a HO3S-1 helicopter. The OY was shot down 5 miles north of Seoul, killing the aerial observer, Captain Edwin E. Rives. First Lieutenant Arthur R. Bancroft was dispatched in a helicopter to rescue the pilot, Second Lieutenant Thomas D. Odenbaugh, but Bancroft's HO3S-1 was also shot down by enemy antiaircraft fire. Bancroft was killed in the crash, and Odenbaugh was declared missing in action on 29 September 1950.*

VMO-6 continued supporting the 1st Division in its drive north of Seoul. On 3 October First Lieutenant Lloyd J. Engelhardt made a rescue of a downed pilot, Captain Wilbur D. Wilcox of VMF-312, in the vicinity of Chun-chon. On the same day Captain Armstrong flew General Clifton B. Cates, Commandant of the Marine Corps, on an inspection tour of the Kimpo-Seoul area. Two days later Engelhardt made another successful rescue, this time an Air Force pilot, near Sibyon-ni.

Acting on a verbal warning order from Major James N. Cupp, Division Air Officer, preparation was started for the embarkation of a surface echelon of VMO-6 to accompany the division on its next operation. One week later the squadron loaded four officers and 70 enlisted men on board LST-1123 and left the next day for Wonsan, Korea. A flight echelon of 17 officers, 19 enlisted men, and most of the squadron's spare parts and tools remained at Kimpo.

On 21 October the squadron responded to an emergency call from the Fifth Air Force. Assistance was needed in evacuating wounded personnel of the Army's 187th Airborne Regiment in the Sukchon area. One HO3S-1, flown by Captain Gene "W" Morrison, and three OYs, flown by Captain Roy L. Thomas and First Lieutenants Arthur W. Poehlman and Robert W. Taylor, were sent to help. Captain Morrison evacuated eight wounded and the OY pilots evacuated a total of five. Rescuing downed pilots continued to be a big part of VMO-6's business; on 24 October Captain Wallace D. Blatt and First Lieutenant Charles C. Ward rescued two Air Force pilots. Blatt picked up Second Lieutenant



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332833

Squadron helicopter pilots conduct a planeside mission brief at Kimpo, October 1950. Pictured left to right are: 1stLt Gustave F. Lueddeke; Capt Victor A. Armstrong; 1stLt Lloyd J. Englehardt; 1stLt Robert A. Longstaff; and Capt George B. Farish.

Thomas J. Pointeck, and Ward rescued First Lieutenant Edwin Thomas. The two pilots had been shot down at Koto-ri, 75 miles north of Wonsan. Three days later Blatt had to travel 116 miles north of Wonsan to pick up Marine Captain Frank K. Reilly Jr., a VMF-312 fighter pilot, who had been shot down by enemy small arms fire. Corporal Edwin F. Lester assisted Captain Blatt on the rescue.

On 25 October the squadron's surface echelon landed at Wonsan. Three days later the flight echelon flew in and immediately the helicopters were put to work evacuating wounded Marines of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines from Kojo, Korea.** VMO-6 operated from Wonsan until the evening of 3 November when it moved to Yonpo Airfield and began supporting the 1st Marine Division in its advance to the Chosin Reservoir.

*The squadron believed that Second Lieutenant Odenbaugh was taken captive but there was never any confirmation by the enemy of his capture, and he was officially listed as missing in action on 29 September 1950. His remains were never found, and he was declared killed in action on 2 December 1953.

**Colonel Gene "W" Morrison recalled that when he landed at Wonsan after the ferry flight from Kimpo he did not even shut his helicopter down. Instead, he received a cockpit briefing and immediately took off for Kojo."



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332832

Without the work of the maintenance personnel the mission could not be accomplished. The upper photographs depict unidentified Marines carrying out maintenance activities at "home" and in the field. The lower left photograph shows, left to right, SSgt Paul W. Fulcher, Capt Robert E. McCluen, and Sgt Herman F. Petruck. The enlisted Marines invented the metal blood holder displayed in the photograph, and Capt McCluen was the first to use it in an actual medical evacuation. The lower right photograph shows Sgt Sherris W. Robinson, unmindful of the snowfall, performing his duties.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 159459



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 156880

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A133585



Cold weather arrived suddenly while the squadron was at Yonpo, and its effects were quickly noted. On the first morning after the drop in temperature, Captain Eugene J. Pope made the initial helicopter launch of the day. Within four or five minutes after take off he returned to base, making a sloppy landing away from the flight line in the snow. His cyclic and collective controls had been so stiff he had nearly crashed.³⁶

As a remedy for the cold weather, lighter greases and oils were used, and when possible all aircraft were hangared at night. It was also necessary to shorten flights for OY pilots and observers to prevent frostbite.

As a tribute to the maintenance crews of VMO-6 the historical diary for October 1950 states:

The foregoing daily resume of the activities of this squadron indicate the operational work accomplished by the pilots, observers, and aircraft of this squadron but does not completely cover the efforts of the ground crews that so successfully maintained the aircraft. Without this work by the aircraft mechanics, such operation could not be accomplished.³⁷

A final key ingredient of VMO-6's excellent maintenance effort was due to the expertise and hard work provided by the Sikorsky technical representative, Mr. Harold Nachlin. It was claimed by many in the squadron that without him it would have been impossible to keep the HO3S-1s flying.³⁸

The mess crews were likewise mentioned:

Besides operational accomplishments, note must be made of the excellent messing which was provided this squadron by the three cooks and one mess supply sergeant assigned. Though hampered by many moves from one area to another, whether by ship, vehicle, or plane, the mess personnel never failed within an hour and one-half to arrange a palatable hot meal for the squadron personnel. Not only should the food and the excellent preparation of it be mentioned but arrangements were always rapidly made to comfortably house the personnel as they ate. Tables and benches were found or constructed and suitable cleaning facilities were always ready. NCOinC of this ingenious mess crew during this squadron's operation from August until present date is TSgt C. P. Witt, USMC.³⁹

Normal flight operations continued until 28 November when the 1st Marine Division became engaged in heavy fighting in the Hagaru-ri and Yudam-ni areas. The Chinese Communists had entered the war in force and Marines were strung out from Hungnam to the Chosin Reservoir. During the epic breakout from the Chosin Reservoir by the 1st Division, VMO-6 OYs flew spotting missions and directed fire on enemy concentrations and

roadblocks, while squadron helicopters were busily engaged flying medical evacuations and rescuing downed pilots from behind enemy lines.

All flyable aircraft were put into the air; an extract from VMO-6's November 1950 historical diary shows the concentrated effort:

28 November 1950

Operations increased sharply as the Division became engaged in heavy fighting in the Hagaru-ri and Yudam-ni area. Crews for both helicopters and OYs were flown to the strip at Hagaru-ri and operations were conducted from that point, thus saving much time in accomplishing missions. All available aircraft flew from dawn to dusk.

Captain G. B. Farish's helicopter was hit by small arms fire while on a resupply mission to Fox Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines near Sinhung-ni. The aircraft was flown to Hagaru-ri strip and left AOG [Aircraft Operationally Grounded] for main rotor transmission which was damaged.

Captain A. F. McCaleb, Jr. directed seven airstrikes from his OY.

Flights conducted consisted of the following:

OY	
Reconnaissance	21
Transportation	7

HO3S-1	
Reconnaissance	1
Transportation	16
Evacuation	23

Total flights 68.	Total flight time 73.7.
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Results of operations are as follows: Fifty casualties evacuated; directed seven airstrikes; conducted two fire missions; located twenty-nine road blocks; located large groups of enemy; estimated 370 enemy troops killed.

29 November 1950

Operations remained at a high level. 1stLt Engelhardt's helicopter was hit by small arms fire while attempting to evacuate a casualty from Sinhung-ni area. The aircraft was returned to the base for repairs.

Flights conducted consisted of the following:

OY	
Reconnaissance	14
Transportation	5

HO3S-1	
Evacuation	21
Transportation	14

Total flights 54.	Total flight time 61.8.
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Results of operations are as follows: Directed twelve airstrikes; conducted three fire missions; covered one motorized convoy and four combat patrols; located six groups of enemy (up to 200 in each group) and three enemy battalions; evacuated 44 casualties. One machine gun destroyed and fifty enemy troops killed.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A158626

Capt Alfred F. McCaleb made use of a "borrowed" Grumman TBM to fly medical evacuees out of Koto-ri during the division's breakout from Yudam-ni.

30 November 1950

Helicopters again performed evacuations and resupply missions from Yudam-ni to Hagaru-ri carrying medical supplies, gas, radio equipment, and tank parts in and casualties out.

All OYs in commission flew today. Lt Taylor, pilot, and Capt Morton, observer, had their OY hit by small arms fire. The plane was safely landed at Hagatu-ri strip.

Flights conducted consisted of the following:

OY
Reconnaissance 7
Transportation 10
Artillery Spotting 3

HO3S-1
Evacuation 18
Transportation 6
Utility 1

Total flights 56.

Total flight time 58.7.

Results of operations are as follows: Covered five patrols; located fourteen road blocks and fifteen groups of enemy up to 250 in size; led eight airstrikes; evacuated fifty casualties; conducted three fire missions; observed results of one air drop.

Monthly totals:

Total flights OY 473.
Total flight time OY 707.4.
Total flights HO3S-1 571.
Total flight time HO3S-1 402.4.⁴⁰

During the Marines' movement to Hungnam the need for more medical evacuation flights became acute. In order to help meet this need a VMO-6 officer, Captain Alfred F. McCaleb, was one of a handful of pilots to fly TBM aircraft borrowed from Navy

and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing flight lines, to evacuate the injured.* In another effort to save valuable time, crews and aircraft conducted operations directly from the Hagaru airstrip.

Although excellent observation and casualty evacuation was provided by VMO-6 during the Chosin breakout, the most important contribution provided by the squadron may have been the psychological boost the helicopters and OYs provided to units separated by enemy action. During the most critical period of the breakout they provided the only physical contact the separated units had with other Marines.

On 3 December First Lieutenant Robert A. Longstaff was shot down and killed by enemy small arms fire while he was attempting to evacuate a seriously wounded Marine near Shinhung-ni. A patrol sent out from the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines recovered his body. On 10 December, as elements of the division began to leave Koto-ri, VMO-6 received verbal orders to prepare for embarkation on board ship. The next day, First Lieutenant Roy Sheil, an observer, and First Lieutenant Adolorde G. Morency, the OY pilot, crashed while they were making a message drop to elements of the withdrawing convoy near Sudong. Their plane struck high wires, went in-

*The TBM "Avenger" was a single-engine, torpedo-bomber built by General Motors under license from the Grumman Aircraft Corporation. It could carry several litter patients and as many as nine ambulatory cases.

to a flat spin, and crashed to the canyon floor. Both the pilot and the observer were picked up by an Army unit and rushed to a hospital in Hamhung. Lieutenant Sheil was later evacuated to a hospital in Japan with a brain concussion, while Lieutenant Morency died enroute to the hospital.

On 12 December the borrowed TBMs were returned to their parent commands, and VMO-6 was ordered on board LST Q082 for transportation to Hungnam. Seven helicopters and their crews remained at Yonpo because of a shortage of shipping space. Loading for the remainder of the squadron, eight OYs and two HO3S-1s, was finally completed on 14 December. The LST departed Hungnam the same day and arrived at Pusan two days later. The squadron's forward echelon then moved overland and established a camp at Masan, Korea. Meanwhile, the helicopters left at Yonpo had moved to an area on the beach at Hungnam for security reasons, and on 17 December three flew to the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB 63) for transportation to Pusan. The next day they were transferred, one each, to the aircraft carriers USS *Leyte* (CV 32), USS *Princeton* (CV 37), and the USS *Philippine Sea* (CV 47). The *Missouri* then returned to shore and took on board three of the remaining helicopters with the fourth helicopter going on board the heavy cruiser USS *St. Paul* (CA 73). Later in the day the three helicopters on board the *Missouri* were transferred to the light aircraft carrier USS *Bataan* (CVL 29) where, during the night, they were damaged by high winds. During the trip to Pusan, the four helicopters not already on the *Bataan* were eventually transferred there, and on 26 December the four flyable helicopters were flown to Masan while the others were off-loaded at Pusan.

On 28 December VMO-6 received three Bell HTL-4 and two HTL-3 helicopters along with another HO3S-1. The HTL was a two-place, single-engine helicopter trainer, used by VMO-6 for evacuation, observation, and liaison missions. The Franklin-built engines used by the HTL-3 and HTL-4 produced 178 horsepower, however due to a difference in landing gear and tailboom construction, the HTL-3 was not considered satisfactory for the rugged hills of Korea, while the HTL-4 was thought to be quite adequate. The squadron now had nine fixed-wing aircraft, and eight HO3S-1, two HTL-3, and three HTL-4 helicopters. Additionally, fresh pilots had accompanied the squadron's new HTLs, providing some relief for the "old hands who were getting pretty tired."⁴¹



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A130980

VMO-6 received the Bell HTL-3 helicopter in December 1950. Squadron pilots considered the engine underpowered for operations in Korea.

The new year opened with VMO-6 operating from a landing strip on the Masan waterfront in support of the 1st Marine Division while plans were concurrently being made for operations further north in the vicinity of Pohang, Korea. Plans were also made to send a detachment of four officers and 11 maintenance men to Itami Airbase, Japan, to maintain a growing pool of HTL helicopters there.

On 13 January 1951, the squadron began the movement to Pohang by a combination of truck convoy, LST, and airlift. Operations continued in support of the 1st Marine Division from both Masan and Pohang until the move was completed on 16 January. On 20 January two TBMs were received from Headquarters Squadron, MAG-12 for temporary custody. These aircraft were to be used as radio relay stations between the regiments and the Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) if normal communications failed.*

Captain Harold G. McRay struck a low cable and crashed while landing an HTL-4 at Andong late in the afternoon of 27 January 1951. The helicopter was only a few feet in the air when the accident occurred, and although it was totally destroyed, neither the pilot nor his distinguished passenger, Brigadier General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, was injured.

*Communications problems were expected in light of the mountainous terrain and the 1st Division's 1,600 square mile operating area while carrying out the Pohang-Andong "guerrilla hunt" of early 1951.

For the next several months VMO-6 moved from one airfield to another in support of the 1st Marine Division. The squadron flew spotting and liaison missions and evacuated the division's casualties. The squadron's executive officer, Captain Clarence W. Parkins, had an unusual experience on a medical evacuation flight on 2 February 1951. Parkins and an accompanying corpsman, R.E. Krisky, were delivering a delirious patient from the 1st Marine Division hospital to the hospital ship USS *Consolation* (AH 15) at Pusan. During the flight, the patient became so violent that it was necessary for Parkins to make a precautionary landing. The crew tied the patient to a stretcher, and continued on without further incident.

On 5 April Major David W. McFarland relieved Major Gottschalk as commanding officer of VMO-6. Before the change of command the officers and enlisted men of VMO-6 proclaimed 27 March as Commanding Officer's Day in honor of Major Gottschalk. He had been the squadron's commanding officer since VMO-6 departed the United States and he

The capability to mount two covered litters on the skids of the Bell HTL-4 made it a markedly better aircraft than the HO3S-1 for carrying medevacs.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A132545



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A131705

MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division, left, and MajGen Christian F. Schilt, who became Commanding General of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing shortly after this picture was taken, center, prepare to leave the VMO-6 camp area after an August 1951 inspection. At right is Maj David W. McFarland, Commanding Officer of VMO-6, 5 April to 5 October 1951.

now had orders transferring him back home. An elaborate evening meal was enjoyed by all and later that evening a party was given by the squadron officers.

It was business as usual on 13 April when Captain Valdemar Schmidt, Jr. and Corporal Robert Sarvia launched in an HO3S-1 to rescue a downed U.S. Air Force pilot about 20 miles behind enemy lines. Enroute to the pickup point the helicopter received numerous hits from small arms fire causing loss of power and control. A crash landing was made in the hilly terrain and the aircraft rolled over upon impact. Captain Schmidt received minor scratches, while Corporal Sarvia experienced a wrenched leg, a cut on the hand, and a severe case of shock. Accompanying F-51 fighter aircraft strafed the area to keep the enemy away from the crash victims until another helicopter, piloted by Captain Frank E. Wilson,

rescued all the downed airmen. The rescue took place late in the evening and it was necessary for Wilson to find his way back in the darkness without the help of navigational aids. Corporal Sarvia and Major B. W. McIntyre, USAF, the downed pilot, were taken to Medical Company E for treatment.

Earlier in the day Captain James R. O'Moore and Technical Sergeant Phillip K. Mackert had been dispatched in an HO3S-1 to pick up a downed pilot also behind enemy lines. Fighter aircraft from VMF-214 assisted Captain O'Moore in searching the area for the downed pilot but found nothing. During the search, one of the VMF-214 aircraft received enemy fire and crashed. Captain O'Moore landed his helicopter at the scene of the crash and, with Mackert's help, extracted the body of the fighter pilot, later identified as Captain Robert "W" Lebo.

On 14 April Captain Gene "W" Morrison, flying an HO3S-1, made three attempts to rescue a downed pilot behind enemy lines but was driven away by intense enemy ground fire each time. Later, Captain Norman G. Ewers also made an attempt, but numerous enemy hits on his helicopter forced him to return to base. The next day planning continued in an effort to rescue the pilot, who had parachuted into enemy territory. A stretcher was rigged with the intention of lowering it through the tree canopy. An OY aircraft was dispatched early in the morning to fly a reconnaissance mission in the area of the downed pilot. Unfortunately, after several attempts by the OY pilot to pinpoint the downed aviator, the mission had to be abandoned because of inclement weather.

A sudden enemy offensive on 23 April caused all available HTL-4 helicopters to be airborne at 0600 to help evacuate the wounded in the 1st Marine Division zone of action. During the day's operation, a total of 50 critically wounded Marines were evacuated from the front lines to pre-designated collecting and clearing stations in the rear. First Lieutenant George A. Eaton accounted for 16 evacuations from the front lines and Captain Dwain L. Redalen carried out 18 evacuations. Redalen logged 9.7 hours and made his final landing at 1930 with the aid of ground lighting.

The sudden enemy offensive caused the squadron to prepare plans for the perimeter defense of the flightline area and all hands were alerted to the imminent danger of attack. Officers and enlisted men were assigned to platoons for control; machine guns were set up to guard the most dangerous avenues of approach, and all lights were secured at dark.

Evacuations were continued the next day and an HTL helicopter, piloted by First Lieutenant Robert E. Mathewson, was shot down while attempting to evacuate wounded Marines from the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Enemy small arms fire hit the engine, instrument pedestal, and tail section of the helicopter causing partial loss of control. The pilot made a crash landing but was not injured. Another helicopter was sent by the squadron to pick up Mathewson but was driven off by heavy enemy fire. The 1st Battalion had been engaged in fighting its way out of an encirclement and Lieutenant Mathewson was given a weapon and joined the fight. Demolition charges were used to destroy the helicopter.

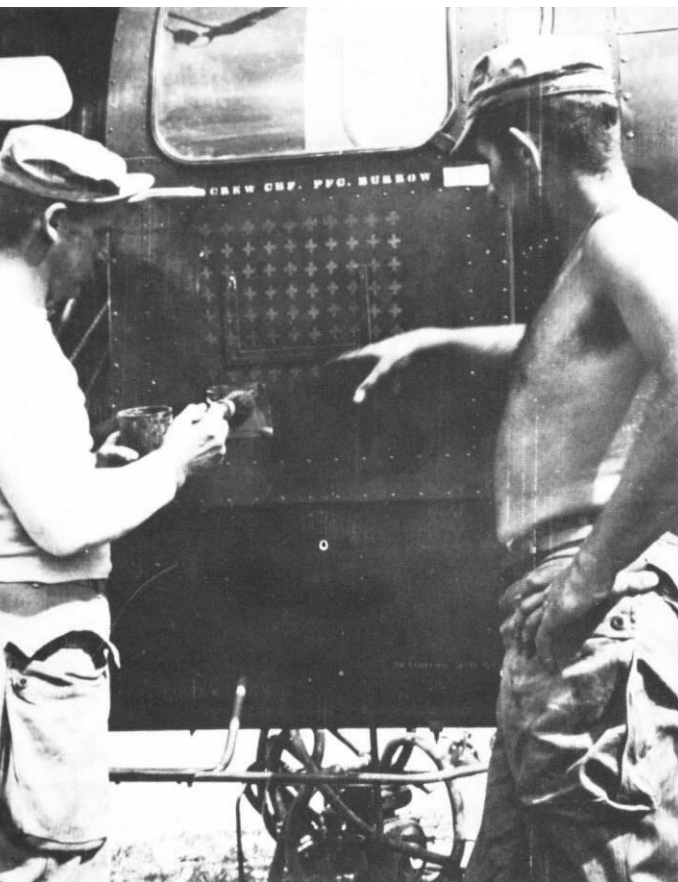
On the same day, 24 April 1951, Technical Sergeant Robert J. Monteith and his observer, First Lieutenant Roscoe F. Good, Jr. were on an artillery spotting mission in an OY over enemy territory when their aircraft had a mid-air collision with a Marine Corsair. Friendly troops in the area witnessed the OY spin to the earth, crash, and burn. Aircraft were dispatched to search for the crashed aircraft and possible survivors, but were unable to locate the crash.*

On 24 April 1951, an OY piloted by Captain John L. Lepire with his observer, First Lieutenant Robert J. O'Shea, was on a reconnaissance mission seeking information on enemy positions. During their flight they flew over a heavy enemy concentration and received fire; no injuries were received but a wing strut on the OY was shot off and Lepire had to make a delicate landing on their return. Later the same day Captain Parkins rescued First Lieutenant Robert R. Wilson of VMF-212, who had parachuted from his disabled F4U Corsair near the front line.

The next month the squadron started receiving the Cessna L-19 "Bird Dog," a light observation aircraft which replaced the older OYs. The L-19, designated the OE-1 by the Marine Corps, was a two-seat aircraft, powered by a 213-horsepower Continental O-470-11, air-cooled engine. The OE-1 had gyroscopic instruments and its rate of climb was superior to that of the OY.⁴²

On 8 May 1951, Captain Alan G. Bateson was giving one of the squadron's new aerial observers, First Lieutenant Edward B. Keyes, Jr., a familiarization

*Good and Monteith were initially listed as MIA but were changed to KIA the same day. Their bodies were recovered 29 August 1951.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A402139

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A167282



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A2855



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A162231

VMO-6's use of the helicopter for combat medical evacuations was a Marine Corps first. In the photograph on the upper left, crew chiefs "record" their latest mission. The squadron performed this mission with a variety of helicopters. Pictured clockwise are the three most significant models it used: the HO3S-1, the HTL-4, and the HO5S-1.

flight of the frontline area in an OY when their aircraft was hit by enemy small arms fire. The aircraft received damage and Bateson was hit in the right leg. The pilot immediately notified the observer that he was hit and turned the aircraft in the direction of a friendly area. First Lieutenant Keyes took off his web belt and passed it to Captain Bateson to use as a tourniquet. Keyes was also able to contact another OY operating nearby, and have it escort the damaged aircraft to the nearest emergency landing field. Keyes had taken over the flight controls and he was flying the plane as best he could. Captain Bateson took over control of the aircraft as it approached the field, and with the assistance of Keyes made a successful landing. Bateson was immediately taken to Medical Company E.

By the middle of May, VMO-6 aircraft had been spotting large concentrations of enemy troops throughout the area and prepared a perimeter defense of its airstrip at Wonju. For the next week the OYs directed artillery fire and airstrikes upon enemy groups. On 19 May an estimated 1,900 enemy were spotted and thirteen F4U Corsairs, twelve AD Skyraiders, and four F9F Panther jets were called to the attack. The airstrikes, combined with six artillery fire missions, left approximately 300 enemy dead, and destroyed four trucks and several gun positions.

On 2 July, First Lieutenant Leonard C. Taft, piloting an OY, and his observer, First Lieutenant Robert J. O'Shea, crash-landed their aircraft in enemy territory during a photographic reconnaissance mission. The squadron immediately began a search with all available aircraft to find their missing companions. Taft's burning aircraft was located but there was no way to ascertain if the crew was still in the aircraft.*

Large numbers of enemy troops continued to be reported, and VMO-6 pilots were busy directing air strikes on the Communists. On 3 September more than 1,100 enemy troops were spotted and the observation section of VMO-6 conducted seven air strikes utilizing nine F4U Corsairs, eight F-51 Mustangs, four F9F Panther jets, and two AD



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A133527

An OE-1 observation plane flies an artillery spotting mission. In May 1951 the squadron began receiving the Cessna-built aircraft, known as the Bird Dog, as a replacement for their aging OY-1s.

Skyraiders. After the air strikes approximately 125 enemy casualties were reported. On the same day they also conducted 25 artillery fire missions which were credited with destroying 95 enemy troops, a supply dump, two enemy command posts, a large bunker, three mortars, and a machine gun position. In addition, six artillery registrations and 43 reconnaissance missions were flown.

On 19 September Master Sergeant Robert J. Russell and his observer Major Douglas K. Morton, crashed on takeoff when the engine of their OE-1 stopped. Upon impact the aircraft burst into flames. Major Morton was evacuated to a hospital in the United States, but Master Sergeant Russell received second and third-degree burns which proved fatal. September continued to be a bad month for the squadron when Major Edward L. Barker's HTL-4 helicopter was hit by enemy artillery fire while he was lifting out a wounded Marine. The pilot escaped injury but the wounded Marine later died from his previous wounds. Two days later an OE was hit by .30 caliber machine gun fire and the observer, Major Robert M. Krippner, was shot through the lower part of his leg. The pilot, Captain Walter P. Dean, was not injured and flew Major Krippner to Medical Company E.

For the remainder of the year and the first part of 1952, VMO-6 continued to support the 1st Marine Division in the X Corps sector.

*There was no conclusive proof of the deaths of either Taft or O'Shea and an investigation stated that they were probably captured by the North Korean Army. It was not until 17 December 1951 that Lieutenant Taft was first mentioned in a propaganda broadcast by North Koreans. First Lieutenant O'Shea was never officially listed as being held captive but was repatriated, along with Taft, in August 1953.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A346183

In 1952 VMO-6 began supporting the 1st Marine Division's operations in western Korea from its homefield at A-9 in the village of Tonggo-ri near Munsan-ni.

When the division moved to western Korea in March, VMO-6 moved to an old landing strip, A-9, in the small village of Tonggo-ri near Munsan-ni.* The forward echelon left Sinchon on 19 March and the move was completed on 29 March 1952. VMO-6 continued operating while the move was being conducted and support of the division was not interrupted. By the end of April the OYs and HO3S-1s were transferred back to the United States and VMO-6 was flying only the OE-1 and HTL type aircraft. The OE-1 had replaced the OY, but the squadron was still waiting for the HO5S-1 helicopter which was to replace the HO3S-1. In any case, VMO-6 had become one of the largest squadrons in the Marine Corps, flying well over 2,000 hours per month.⁴³

The squadron's influence on A-9 is seen more clearly in this ground view. Note the field had been named after 1stLt Arthur R. Bancroft, a squadron pilot killed during the battle for Seoul in 1950.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332835



*Airfields designated "K" in Korea were major installations, and those in the "X" category were auxiliary strips. "A" designations were near of U.S. Army installations.

During the spring of 1952, Major William G. MacLean, Jr., the squadron executive officer, worked out a plan for siting evacuation helicopters, crews, and maintenance personnel at a central location near the front. Known as the forward evacuation echelon it enabled helicopters to reach any part of the front within 5 minutes of takeoff, cutting evacuation time in half. Operations at the echelon began in June, and within the first year over a thousand night evacuations alone had been conducted. It operated 24 hours a day and was manned on a rotational basis by five officers and nine enlisted men. Two to four HTL helicopters provided the lift.⁴⁴



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A346328

The first Sikorsky HO4S-1 helicopters were delivered to VMO-6 in July 1952 by a detachment of six officers and nine enlisted men from HMX-1.

Expanded OE activities also contributed to the squadron's rising operational tempo. Like the helicopter section, the OE crews began operating on a 24-hour basis with the institution of a schedule of night observation flights. As the squadron had found out during the Okinawa campaign, night flights provided a cheap and effective way to suppress the enemy's activities during the hours of darkness. OE operations further increased when they were tasked to provide air support for the ROK Marines on the 1st Division's left flank.*

During July 1952, VMO-6 started receiving the Sikorsky HO4S-1 helicopter, and by the end of the month the squadron had eight HO4S-1s in addition to ten OE-1s and nine HTL-4s. The HO4S-1 was a three-seat utility helicopter capable of carrying up to 750 pounds. For short-range flights, four passengers could be accommodated, and with the seats removed, two stretchers could be carried inside the cabin. The HO4S-1 had three main rotor blades and a two-bladed tail rotor. It was the first U.S. helicopter to be fitted with all-metal blades. The HO4S-1 was powered by a 245-horsepower Franklin 6V6-245-B16F, six-cylinder, vertically mounted, fan-cooled engine. It could reach a maximum speed of 110 miles per hour but normally cruised at 96 miles per hour.⁴⁵

On 9 September 1952, Captain Robert B. Lipscombe, Jr., and Second Lieutenant Roland L. McDaniel were shot down while flying a reconnaissance mission in their OE. Ground observers saw the action, and also saw two parachutes open and drift to the ground behind enemy lines. They later noted the enemy leading personnel to the rear. Both

Lipscomb and McDaniel were listed as missing in action. The same day Captain Donald K. Trotter Jr. and Second Lieutenant Emile A. Walker were also shot down in an OE. Trotter and Walker had been searching for Lipscomb and McDaniel when they were hit and forced down behind enemy lines. They were also listed as missing in action.**

The next month Captain Arthur R. Morin and his observer, Major Robert A. Owens, were shot down in an OE and crashed behind enemy lines. The pilot and observer were listed as missing in action on 4 October.***

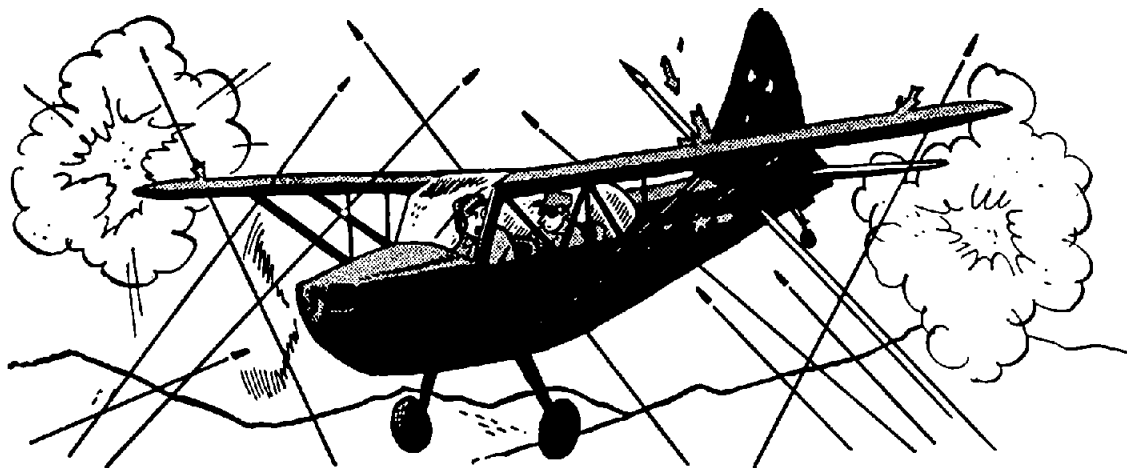
Despite aircrew losses the exceptional morale of the officers and men of VMO-6 was demonstrated by their "can do" spirit. Major Wallace J. Slappey Jr., the commanding officer of the squadron during a portion of 1952 commented:

Morale was extremely high during this entire period and the squadron was loaded with gung-ho personnel. Pilots were actually stealing flights from each other The engineering department was outstanding, working around the clock Pilots from other squadrons in the Wing, having completed their tours, requested extensions and assignment to VMO-6 Every man pulled his weight simply by knowing what had to be done and doing it willingly.⁴⁶

**Captain Robert B. Lipscombe, Jr. and Second Lieutenant Roland L. McDaniel were captured by the North Koreans on 9 September and released in August 1953. When Captain Lipscombe was released he verified the deaths of Trotter and Walker. They had been killed in action when their plane crashed after being shot down.

***On 15 December 1953, the status of both Morin and Owens was changed to that of killed in action and their remains were determined to be non-recoverable.

*The 1st MAW substantially augmented the squadron with pilots to assist it in meeting these increased commitments.



"WELL, IT'S LIKE THIS—AFTER ABOUT A HUNNERT MISSIONS AS A FIGHTER PILOT, THEY FIGGERED I'D BEEN LIVIN' DANGEROUSLY LONG ENOUGH..."

(Marine Corps Association)

This cartoon by SSgt N. E. Packwood, Jr., makes fun of the pilots who, having completed their normal tours in Korea, requested extensions and assignment to VMO-6.

In April 1953, the squadron increased its ability to support the 1st Marine Division when it worked out a system for night close air support. Placed in operation during the latter half of the month, the plan made use of ground troops to light the target area with search lights. When the tactical air observer spotted a target he then directed air strikes or artillery fire on it. The observers' debriefing forms indicated the new system achieved excellent results.

The next month, when the 1st Marine Division's infantry regiments went into reserve status, VMO-6 remained at the front spotting artillery for the 11th Marines.

All of the squadron's HO5S-1s were grounded on 25 July by the Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, because of numerous tail boom failures which had occurred in the United States. The HO5S-1s were permitted to fly only on emergency missions. On 18 July First Lieutenant Charles B. Marino and his observer, First Lieutenant Wilson A. Frease were hit by antiaircraft fire behind enemy lines and crashed out of control in friendly territory. A search party from the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was enroute to the wreckage when it was forced back by enemy artillery fire. After darkness, the party reached the wreckage and the bodies were recovered.

After the armistice agreement was signed near the end of July, the primary mission of the fixed-wing

section of VMO-6 became one of surveillance of the demilitarized zone. It noted any violations committed by aircraft or ground personnel, and reported any troop movements within the Communist-controlled sector. The helicopter section continued providing medical evacuation support. The squadron also remained busy participating in command post exercises run by various commands within the 1st Marine Division. In August, the squadron's last HTL helicopter was transported back to the United States, leaving VMO-6 with 12 OE-1s and 12 HO5S-1s. The parts necessary to repair the tailboom on the HO5S-1s arrived on 2 October and the helicopters were flown to Ascom City, location of Marine Helicopter Squadron 161's (HMR-161) rear echelon, where the repairs were made.*

The squadron maintained a rigid training schedule and newly assigned pilots and crews were indoctrinated in the type of flying necessary for survival in the Korean hills. The helicopter pilots had to become familiar with more than 90 helicopter sites and be able to reach them during the day or night. The OE pilots had to learn to use a hand-held camera while flying and, at the same time, make

*For more information on HMM-161 see: Parker, *A History of Marine Medium Helicopter 161* (Washington: History & Museums Division, HQMC, 1978).