

Marine Corps Historical Collection

*Three F-4Ns of VMFA-323 are lined up on the flight deck of the USS Coral Sea (CV-43) in the waters of Southwest Asia during the Iran hostage crisis of 1980. Note the F-4N Phantom of VMFA-531, the sister squadron on board ship, in the left foreground.*

Phantoms departed El Toro for NAS Alameda for eventual loading on board the *Coral Sea*. The Command Chronology for the July-December 1979 period included a statement heralding the beginning of the long-awaited carrier deployment:

After eleven months of hard work, hundreds of FCLP sorties, thousands of landings, four deployments to shore bases and seven deployments aboard ship, VMFA-323 sailed on 13 November from Alameda to begin its first overseas deployment in ten years.<sup>102</sup>

The months on board the *Coral Sea* were busy and exciting for the Death Rattlers.

The squadron was scheduled to participate in an exercise with other units of the *Coral Sea's* battle group, but crucial events in Iran and Korea required its cancellation. The battle group set out at high speed toward South Korea. While cruising near Guam on 28 November 1979, two squadron Phantoms intercepted Soviet Tu-95 Bear bombers as they flew near the *Coral Sea*.

On 9 December, the *Coral Sea* steamed in waters near Okinawa and one of the squadron's Phantoms landed at Kadena, the Death Rattlers' old home field of World War II. One day later, the *Coral Sea* dropped anchor at Pusan, where the squadron had begun operations during the Korean War. The *Coral Sea*, as part of the Seventh Fleet, was standing by for any contingency which might arise following the assassination

of South Korean President Chung Hee Park. Later in the month, the squadron operated from NAS Cubi Point while the *Coral Sea* put in at the Subic Bay Naval Station for replenishment. The Snakes flew training flights at Cubi Point until 8 January 1980, when they rejoined the *Coral Sea* as she departed Philippine waters for the 10-day voyage to Pattaya, Thailand.

On 30 January, the *Coral Sea* began its passage through the Strait of Malacca following a four-day respite in Singapore. During the voyage around the southern tip of India, the squadron was on alert status 24 hours a day, and during that time, several Phantoms were launched to intercept and escort Soviet Il-38 May reconnaissance aircraft as they flew over the battle group. On 7 February 1980, the *Coral Sea* relieved the USS *Midway* and arrived on station in the Gulf of Oman. Soviet reconnaissance of the battle group increased in March 1980, and seven of their aircraft were intercepted and escorted by VMFA-323 Phantoms.

Air operations intensified for the Death Rattlers while the *Coral Sea* steamed in the waters of Southwest Asia. Aerial refueling flights with USAF KC-135s were conducted during April as part of the joint operation to rescue the American hostages held in Iran. In May, the *Coral Sea* headed east toward Subic Bay. During a port period from 9 to 21 May 1980, squadron activities centered on maintenance for the air-

craft and liberty for all hands, their first in over 100 days.

The battle group departed Subic Bay on 21 May, expecting to reach Hawaii within two weeks. Riots broke out in South Korea, however, and the battle group was diverted back to that region. While in Korean waters, the squadron flew 19 CAP missions. After the USS *Midway* (CV-41) relieved the *Coral Sea* on 31 May, the Death Rattlers were once again homeward bound.

The earlier course to Hawaii was dropped in favor of a great circle route to the west coast of the United States. The new course brought the battle group within the range of Soviet aircraft based near the port city of Vladivostok. As a consequence, the Snakes remained on 24-hour alert until 8 June 1980.

Two days later, the Death Rattler Phantoms launched from the deck of the *Coral Sea* for the last time. As the command chronology recorded:

On 10 June the squadron recorded its last arrested landing aboard the USS *Coral Sea* and flew 8 aircraft to MCAS El Toro and a long-awaited homecoming for the 16 aircrew. That scene was repeated several times the next day as VMFA-323 enlisted personnel met family and friends at NAS Alameda and at MCAS El Toro. The embark [debar] was effected with few flaws and after several days of well-deserved rest, VMFA-323 returned to shore-based duties as a member of MAG-11.<sup>103</sup>

The *Coral Sea* deployment was clearly the highlight of the post-Vietnam era for the Death Rattlers of VMFA-323. It was, as well, the first time since World War II that two Marine fighter squadrons, VMFA-323 and VMFA-531, deployed together on board a Pacific Fleet carrier.<sup>104</sup> As Lieutenant (jg) John W. Dickson, Public Affairs Officer on board the *Coral Sea*, stated:

Whenever a carrier like this deploys, there are several attack and fighter squadrons aboard, but this is the first time two fighter squadrons have been Marines . . . . It's a prime example of the Navy-Marine Corps team.<sup>105</sup>

With the Death Rattlers back at El Toro, the flight training emphasis in July 1980 shifted to ground attack missions. There was also a return to air combat tactics in July 1980 when the squadron provided adversary aircraft support to the 162nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, an Air National Guard unit in Tucson, Arizona.

On 14 August, Lieutenant Colonel Denton was relieved by Lieutenant Colonel Christian F. DeFries, Jr., as commanding officer. The pace of operations continued to be high as the Death Rattlers concentrated on a variety of training tasks. Among these was a deployment to Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, on 17 August to further hone their fighter skills. This time

the adversaries were F-15 Eagles from Bitburg, Germany, and Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico.<sup>106</sup>

In October, another squadron reunion was held, and one of the dignitaries in attendance was Lieutenant General George C. Axtell, Jr., the squadron's first skipper. The Snakes also proudly displayed the Hansen Award designating them as Fighter Squadron of the Year.

The entire month of January 1981 was spent at Nellis Air Force Base, two weeks working as fighter adversaries for the Air Force Fighter Weapons School and two weeks as part of the Red Forces in a Red Flag exercise.<sup>107</sup>

In April, the Snakes suffered a severe loss when Major John C. McAnnally, squadron executive officer, crashed while flying a fighter attack escort mission in the Leach Lake tactics range. The squadron continued to fly numerous dissimilar aircraft sorties with VMA-311 in order to enhance its skills in aerial combat.

In May, the squadron deployed four aircraft to NAS Fallon for dissimilar aircraft operations against F-5s. During the third week of June, the squadron skipper, Lieutenant Colonel DeFries, had the honor of giving Mr. John C. Severino, president of ABC Television, a ride in the back seat of a Phantom. Mr. Severino emerged from the aircraft after the flight thoroughly delighted and ready to fly again.

August 1981 began with preparations for deployment of a contingent from the squadron to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, scheduled for the end of the month. USAF KC-135 tankers were scheduled to provide refueling support for the operation. On 28 August Lieutenant Colonel DeFries with four Phantoms, four Intruders from VMA(AW)-242, and four KC-135 aircraft deployed as planned. Upon their return on 31 August, the aircrews reported that the exercise had been a complete success. It was noted as well that never before had KC-135s been used as tanker support for Marine squadrons on a trans-Pacific deployment.<sup>108</sup>

On 4 September, the squadron received a new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jerry R. Cadick. In October, the Death Rattlers again worked with a fighter squadron at Nellis Air Force Base. The aircrews gained valuable experience as they engaged the adversarial F-5s of the 64th Fighter Weapons Squadron.

The first few months of 1982 found the Death Rattlers engaged in a missile firing exercise and flying in support of two operations in the Twentynine Palms region. In March and April, the squadron took part in Operation Gallant Eagle 82 which involved 25,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. Death Rattler

Phantoms were used in the delivery of live ordnance at one point in the exercise.<sup>109</sup> In May, aircrews from VMFA-323 took part in two air shows, one at El Toro and the other at McChord Air Force Base.

In July, the squadron made its final deployment with the F-4N Phantom II when it flew in support of an exercise at Nellis Air Force Base. Following this assignment, the Death Rattlers began transferring their aircraft to other units, in preparation for receiving the F/A-18 Hornet. One of the Phantoms was transferred to NAS, Norfolk, Virginia, to be part of a static display. Five others shared a less appealing fate; they were sent to the Naval Weapons Center at China Lake to be used as drones. By 14 September 1982, all Phantoms had been transferred.

September brought new aircraft and a new commanding officer. On 10 September 1983, Lieutenant Colonel Gary R. VanGysel relieved Lieutenant Colonel Cadick as skipper of the Snakes. Later in the month the first group of eight pilots reported to NAS Lemoore, California, to begin transition training in the Hornet. The pilots received their training in Fighter Attack Squadron 125 (VFA-125), a unique squadron because of its composition of both Navy and Marine personnel.

The F/A-18 Hornet came highly recommended. In December 1981, Brigadier General Harry T. Hagaman, a Death Rattler skipper during the Vietnam era, judged the Hornet to be unequalled by any other Navy aircraft for maneuverability in the fighter mode. He considered the Hornet to be ideally suited to the air-to-air mission as well as air-to-ground operations.<sup>110</sup> Lieutenant General William J. White, Deputy Chief of Staff (Aviation), was equally optimistic about the Hornet. He stated that the F/A-18 will "clearly pro-

vide Marine Aviation with significantly enhanced combat superiority, both as a fighter and attack aircraft, over the F-4 that it replaces." Lieutenant General White added that the Hornet was already exceeding the established specifications for reliability and maintainability.<sup>111</sup>

On 29 September 1982, Lieutenant Colonel VanGysel became the first member of VMFA-323 to fly the F/A-18. A second group of eight pilots began the Hornet transition course at Lemoore in November. On 25 February 1983, the first group of pilots assigned to the transition course completed their work and reported back to MCAS El Toro.

Less than one month later, on 21 March 1983, Lieutenant Colonel Van Gysel flew the first squadron Hornet to its new home at El Toro. Major General Clayton L. Comfort, Commanding General, 3d MAW, and Colonel Donald D. Bergman, Commanding Officer, MAG-11, were on hand as the Death Rattlers' first F/A-18 made its way down the flight line. Lieutenant Colonel Van Gysel spoke highly of the Hornet during a brief ceremony:

Possessing this aircraft allows us to use the knowledge we've learned and the training we've received in the last seven months. We've put together a practically new squadron but couldn't do any work without the aircraft. It's great to be back in business!<sup>112</sup>

A second F/A-18 arrived two days later.

During April 1983, the squadron began limited operations in proficiency flying, area familiarization, and two-plane tactics. On 25 April, the second group of eight pilots returned to El Toro from Hornet transition training. During 27-28 April, elements of the squadron participated in the 3d MAW exercise, Comfort Level V. These exercises, named after Major Gener-

*Two VMFA-323 F/A-18 "Hornets" in flight formation off the California coast.*

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al Comfort, were operational readiness inspections designed to maintain peak squadron performance. As part of the exercise the Death Rattlers maintained a continuous hot pad alert and flew both day and night operations, using the four Hornets in their possession.

In May, the Snakes deployed for the first time with Hornets to Luke Air Force Base and operated against both F-15 and F-16 aircraft. The four-day effort was devoted to pilot training with the Hornet's advanced weapons systems against the Air Force aircraft. Following the exercise the Hornet was judged to have held a slight edge over the Air Force planes because of its weapons system and avionics. Snake pilot First Lieutenant Dale A. Homire concluded that "a big advantage for us was the ability to fight in a wide envelope at high and low speeds."<sup>113</sup>

By 6 May 1983, the inventory of Hornets had grown to eight, and operations were aimed at certifying pilots in air-to-air and air-to-ground tactics. In addition to regular training, one of the Hornets was flown in the annual El Toro Air Show.

Flight operations intensified the following month. During 20-24 June the squadron completed its first extended session of air-to-air gunnery. The Snakes also provided two aircraft and one pilot for carrier qualification on board the USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63). During 27-28 June, Captain James F. Flock became the first Death Rattler to carrier qualify in the F/A-18.

Training in air-to-air operations continued in July with a 12-day deployment of six Hornets to Luke Air Force Base. The pilots gained valuable knowledge in hot weather operations and in air-to-air operations against F-15 and F-16 aircraft. In August 1983, the squadron began air-to-air gunnery practice firing at a towed banner. It was the first aerial gunnery work since the days of the Crusader, the last plane with internal guns flown by the Snakes.

During 12-16 September, the squadron completed its first live missile firing. Low altitude tactics training rounded out flight operations for the month. On 28 September, the squadron took delivery on its twelfth Hornet.

The first 13 days of October found the Snakes deployed to NAS, Fallon, Nevada, for work on low altitude tactics and air-to-ground bombing. Following this deployment, all squadron members met the training and readiness syllabus criteria for being combat ready. In November, the Death Rattlers took part in exercise Red Flag at Nellis Air Force Base. The VMFA-323 Hornets flew as aggressors during the first week against a variety of opposing aircraft. Roles were reversed during the second week and the squadron's combat readiness posture was further enhanced. The

squadron completed Red Flag on 23 November and returned to El Toro. First Lieutenant Nathan R. Hines, USAF air controller during the exercise, had high praise for the flying ability of the Snake pilots:

Overall we all are extremely impressed with the way they flew. The F/A-18 and Marine pilots are an awesome team. I'm glad they're on our side.<sup>114</sup>

The Death Rattlers began 1984 with comprehensive preparation for a Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRES), a rigorous examination of all aspects of the squadron's proficiency. By that time VMFA-323 had completed all the necessary F/A-18 transition milestones, and the squadron personnel, both pilots and maintenance technicians, had achieved high levels of expertise with the Hornet.

When the MCCRES finally concluded in February 1984 there was no doubt of the squadron's readiness for combat. As the command chronology related, all phases of the testing were passed with flying colors:

When MCCRES was over, the squadron had demonstrated that it was truly combat ready. It achieved a grade of 98 percent. Of the 1100 academic questions tested, only one was missed. Pilots surpassed all previous records in air-to-air gunnery. Not a single evaluated all-weather intercept (AWI) was missed. Scored bombing, both day and night, achieved a better than 50' Circular Error Probable (CEP). Air-to-air combat maneuvering against sophisticated Air Force F-15 adversaries, resulted in successful engagement scores.<sup>115</sup>

Within hours of completing the MCCRES the squadron was evaluated in an Inspector General's visit. All functional areas were graded either "excellent" or "outstanding." Soon after the completion of this inspection the squadron skipper, Lieutenant Colonel Van Gysel, departed for the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California, to assume the duty as Commanding Officer, Aviation Combat Element (ACE) for Combined Action Exercise 5-84 (CAX 5-84).

Late in March 1984, the Snakes flew several days of FCLPs in preparation for deployment on board the USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70), and four of the Death Rattler pilots earned both day and night carrier qualifications during this deployment. March also found the squadron hosting elements of the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron from Luke Air Force Base for dissimilar air combat maneuvering training. In addition, the Snakes conducted electronic countermeasures work with Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 2 (VMAQ-2) from MCAS, Cherry Point, North Carolina, and they participated in Comfort Level IX. On 30 March, the squadron was honored to host the Secretary of the Navy, John F. Lehman, Jr., for an air com-

bat maneuvering exercise pitting two Hornets against two F-14As.

April found the Death Rattlers continuing weapons and tactics training in deployments to MCAS Yuma, NAS Lemoore, and NAS China Lake. The month closed out with FCLP training for five pilots in preparation for day and night aircraft carrier qualifications on board the USS *Constellation* (CV-64) in May.

On 1 June 1984, Lieutenant Colonel Donald A. Beaufait relieved Lieutenant Colonel Van Gysel as Commanding Officer. Later in the month the Snakes took part in dissimilar air-to-air training with the 57th Fighter Weapons Wing at Nellis Air Force Base.

Today the squadron exhibits the same spirit and zeal it has shown for more than 40 years of continuous operations. From the record-breaking events of 1945 when its pilots flew against the Japanese in the battle for Okinawa, through three hard years in Korea and three demanding tours of duty in Vietnam, as well as the many years of strenuous training, the Death Rattlers have always given their best for Corps and country. Their high state of readiness with the first-line F/A-18 Hornet signals a bright future and the continuation of a tradition of excellence. They remain ready to live by their motto: "Come to Fight—Come to Win!"

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# NOTES

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The primary source materials used in the preparation of this history are held by the History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., hereafter Hist&MusDiv. These materials may be reviewed at the Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Building 58, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

## Commissioning and Preparation For Combat

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the VMF-323 World War II War Diaries, hereafter VMF-323 WW II WarD.

1. "The Last of the Corsairs," *Naval Aviation News*, Mar53, pp. 1-5.
2. Col Clarence H. Moore, Comments on draft ms, 6Aug85 (Comments File, MCHC), hereafter Moore comments.
3. Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), p. 263.
4. VMF-323 WW II WarD, Aug44.

## Combat in the Okinawa Campaign

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the VMF-323 WW II WarD.

5. Moore comments.
6. Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation: History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. 5 (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1968), pp. 95-96, hereafter Frank and Shaw, *Victory and Occupation*.
7. Robert Sherrrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, 2nd ed. (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1980), p. 369, hereafter Sherrrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in WWII*.
8. VMF-323 WW II WarD, Apr45.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Sherrrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in WWII*, p. 388.

15. Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 565.
16. Frank and Shaw, *Victory and Occupation*, p. 224.
17. Sherrrod, *Marine Corps Aviation in WWII*, p. 394.
18. "'Death Rattlers' on Way Home: Bag 124½ Jap Planes in 2 Months at Okinawa," *Los Angeles Star-News and Post*, 28Jun45, p. 16.
19. "The Corsair in the Marine Corps," brochure from the U.S. Marine Corps Museum, n.d.

## Post-World War II: 1946-1950

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the base newspaper, *Flight Jacket*, Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California.

20. "VMF-323 Claims Record Set By Dead-Eye Pilot," *Flight Jacket*, 11Jun48, p. 1.
21. CO, VMF-323 report on MICOWEX-49A, to CO, MAG-33, KV33 (323)/A8/mdc, Serial 04-49.

## Action in Korea: 1950-1953

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from VMF-323 Historical Diaries, hereafter VMF-323 HistD.

22. Andrew Geer, *The New Breed: The Story of the U.S. Marines in Korea* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 12.
23. Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, *The Pusan Perimeter: U.S. Marine Operations in Korea 1950-1953*, vol. 1 (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1954), p. 90, hereafter Montross and Canzona, *The Pusan Perimeter*.
24. Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air), *United States Naval Aviation 1910-1970* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 183.
25. Montross and Canzona, *The Pusan Perimeter*, p. 98.
26. Ibid., p. 139.
27. Ernest H. Giusti, "Marine Air Over the Pusan Perimeter," *Marine Corps Gazette*, May52, p. 25.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
29. Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, *The Inchon-Seoul Operation: U.S. Marine Operations in Korea 1950-1953*, vol. 2 (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1955), p. 102.
30. Ernest H. Giusti and Kenneth W. Condit, "Marine Air Over Inchon-Seoul," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Jun52, p. 20.
31. VMF-323, HistD, Oct50.
32. Kenneth W. Condit and Ernest H. Giusti, "Marine Air at the Chosin Reservoir," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Jul52, p. 19.
33. LtCol Leo J. Ihli, Comments on draft ms, 13Aug85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Ihli comments.
34. Ernest H. Giusti and Kenneth W. Condit, "Marine Air Covers the Breakout," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Aug52, p. 22.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
36. Ihli comments.
37. Ihli comments.
38. LtCol Pat Meid, USMCR, and Maj James M. Yingling, USMC, *Operations in West Korea: U.S. Marine Operations in Korea 1950-1953*, vol. 5 (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1972), pp. 403, 420, 439, hereafter Meid and Yingling, *Operations in West Korea*.
39. Ihli comments.
40. VMF-323 HistD, Apr51.
41. Meid and Yingling, *Operations in West Korea*, p. 437.
42. Miller and Cummings comments.
43. Col Henry S. Miller, Comments on draft ms, 30Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Miller comments.
44. LtCol Willard C. Lemke, Comments on draft ms, 28Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Lemke comments.
45. Miller comments.
46. Col William M. Frash, Comments on draft ms, 14Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Frash comments.
47. Frash comments.
48. Moore comments.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
50. LtCol William M. Watkins, Comments on draft ms, 5Aug85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Watkins comments.

**El Toro and the Dominican Republic Episode:  
1953-1965**

Unless otherwise noted the material in this section was derived from the squadron's Command Diary,

hereafter VMA-323 or VMFA-323 ComdD; the MCAS El Toro base newspaper, *Flight Jacket*; and the MCAS Cherry Point base newspaper, *The Windsock*.

51. VMA-323 ComdD, Jul53.
52. *Ibid.*, Dec53.
53. Watkins comments.
54. "Marines First in Legion Flyover—Lead Aerial Parade at Coliseum," *Flight Jacket*, 31Aug56, p. 1.
55. "Third Wing Planes Amass 5000 Hours in Deployment," *Flight Jacket*, 7Sep56, p. 1.
56. "'Fury' and 'Skyhawk' Join Toro Fighter Units," *Flight Jacket*, 28Sep56, p. 1.
57. Gordon Swanborough and Peter M. Bowers, *United States Navy Aircraft Since 1911*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976), p. 231.
58. Lt Daniel L. Cummings, Comments on draft ms, 23Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Cummings comments.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*
65. "VMF-323 Returns from Whidby Island Maneuvers," *Flight Jacket*, 4Sep59, p. 3.
66. "VMF-323 Pilots to Train Aboard Aircraft Carrier," *Flight Jacket*, 19Feb60, p. 13.
67. "VMF-323 Going to Pacific Area," *Flight Jacket*, 20Oct61, p. 2.
68. "323 Back from Overseas After Six-month Cruise in Western Pacific," *Flight Jacket*, 18May62, p. 5.
69. "323 Return from Dallas Deployment," *Flight Jacket*, 29Jun62, p. 6.
70. "MAG-33 on Heavy Schedule at Yuma," *Flight Jacket*, 11Jan63, p. 5.
71. "323 Yuma Trip Successful," *Flight Jacket*, 1Feb63, p. 1.
72. "Wing Units in 'Steel Gate' Action," *Flight Jacket*, 8Mar63, p. 1.
73. "'Desert Winds' Begins at 29 Palms," *Flight Jacket*, 15Mar63, p. 1. "'Desert Winds' Ends," *Flight Jacket*, 22Mar63, p. 1.
74. Maj Donald K. Tooker, Comments on draft ms, 4Aug85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Tooker comments.
75. Tooker comments. It is noteworthy that Lt Judkins subsequently recovered and flew one more flight in the F-8. He then resigned his commission and became a pilot for Delta Airlines where he is a captain today, according to Maj Tooker. Lt Judkins' experience



was indeed remarkable. He is reported to be one of only two known pilots who have fallen more than 10,000 feet and lived to tell the story. His exploits, and more of Maj Tooker's, were recorded in articles in *True Magazine* (March 1964) and *Readers' Digest* (October 1967).

76. Special Report 304-63, 3d MAW, "Green Wave," Jul63.

77. Tooker comments.

78. "First NAO Reports for VMFA-323 Duty," *The Windsock*, 21Aug64, p. 1.

79. MajGen Norman W. Gourley, Comments on draft ms, nd (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Gourley comments.

80. VMFA-323, ComdD, 13Mar-10May65.

81. "VMFA-323 Scores Records At P.R.," *The Windsock*, 23Apr65, p. 8; Gourley comments.

82. "Blistering Pace Set By Death Rattlers In P.R.," *The Windsock*, 28May65, p. 16.

#### The Vietnam Years: 1965-1969

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived exclusively from VMFA-323 Command Chronologies, hereafter VMFA-323 ComdC.

83. 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec65.

84. Marine Aircraft Group 24, ComdC, 1Jul-31Dec65.

85. VMFA-323 ComdC, Feb67.

86. Col Gordon H. Keller, Jr., Comments on draft ms, nd (Comment File, MCHC) "The Death Rattlers," *Torii Teller*, 17Jul67, pp. 7-8, hereafter "The Death Rattlers."

87. VMFA-323 ComdC, Jun67.

88. Capt Moyers S. Shore II, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington: Hist&MusDiv, HQMC, 1969), pp. 100-101.

89. BGen Harry T. Hagaman, Comments on draft ms, 22Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC).

90. *Ibid.*, May68.

91. *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*, Mar69.

93. *Ibid.*, Jul-Dec69.

94. LtCol Thomas G. Leach, Comments on draft ms, 29Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC).

#### El Toro Again: 1969-1984

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from VMFA-323 Command Chronologies, hereafter VMFA-323 ComdC.

95. VMFA-323 ComdC, Jul-Dec71.

96. BGen Michael P. Sullivan, Comments on draft ms, 15Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Sullivan comments.

97. Sullivan comments.

98. VMFA-323 ComdC, Jan-Jun77.

99. LtCol Hardy A. Slone, Comments on draft ms, 28Jul85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Slone comments.

100. Slone comments.

101. VMFA-323 ComdC, Jul-Dec78.

102. VMFA-323 ComdC, Jul-Dec79.

103. VMFA-323 ComdC, Jan-Jun80.

104. "Historic First for *Coral Sea* and Air Wing Fourteen" (VMFA-323 Unit File, RefSec, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

105. "Marine Carrier Squadron Serving 162 Days at Sea" (VMFA-323 Unit File, RefSec, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

106. Col Christian F. DeFries, Jr., Comments on draft ms, 1Aug85 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter DeFries comments.

107. DeFries comments.

108. DeFries comments.

109. "Gallant Eagle 82: 'Quite a Show and a Whole Lot More,'" *HQMC Hotline*, vol. 11, May82, p. 6.

110. BGen H. T. Hagaman, "A Marine Reports on the F/A-18," *Marine Corps Gazette*, vol. 65, Dec81, p. 28.

111. LtGen William J. White, "Status of Marine Aviation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, vol. 66, May82, p. 20.

112. "Death Rattlers' Welcome Arrival of Their First F/A-18 Hornet Jet," *Flight Jacket*, 25Mar83, p. 1.

113. "VMFA-323 Takes Hornets to Desert for Joint Training," *Flight Jacket*, 13May83, p. 10.

114. "Red Flag Pits Marines Against Air Force in Tough Air Training," *Flight Jacket*, 2Dec83, p. 4.

115. VMFA-323 ComdC, 1Jan-31Jul84.

# Appendix A

## CHRONOLOGY

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- 1 August 1943 Commissioned as Marine Fighting Squadron 323 (VMF-323) at Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, and assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 32, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing; trained at Marine Corps Auxiliary Air Facility, Oak Grove, Pollocksville, North Carolina.
- 12 January 1944 Relocated to Naval Auxiliary Air Station, El Centro, California, and reassigned to Marine Base Defense Aircraft Group 43, Marine Fleet Air, West Coast.
- 21 July 1944 Deployed to Marine Corps Air Station, Ewa, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 32, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- August 1944 Redeployed to Emirau Island, Bismarck Archipelago.
- 24 October 1944 Redeployed to Luganville Field, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides.
- March 1945 On board the USS *White Plains* (CVE-66) enroute to Okinawa.
- 9 April 1945 Relocated to Kadena airbase, Okinawa.
- April - July 1945 Participated in the Okinawa Campaign operating from Kadena airbase, Okinawa.
- 15 July 1945 Relocated to Awase airbase, Okinawa.
- 6 February 1946 Boarded the USS *Cape Gloucester* (CVE-109) returning to the United States.
- 15 March 1946 Relocated to Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 33, Marine Fleet Air, West Coast.
- October 1947 Reassigned to 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 16 July 1950 Participated in the Korean War, operating from the USS *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116); Bofu; Pusan; the USS *Sicily* (CVE-118); Kangnung; and Pyongtaeng-ni.
- 30 June 1952 Redesignated Marine Attack Squadron 323 (VMA-323).
- 6 July 1953 Redeployed to Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 15, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 15 September 1955 Reassigned, as a unit in Marine Aircraft Group 15, to 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 31 December 1956 Redesignated Marine Fighter Squadron 323 (VMF-323).
- 30 June 1957 Redeployed to Naval Air Station, Atsugi, Japan, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 11, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- September 1958 Redeployed to Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 33, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 19 July 1962 Redesignated Marine All Weather Fighter Squadron 323 (VMF(AW)-323).
- June 1963 Redeployed to Naval Air Station, Atsugi, Japan, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 11, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 1 July 1964 Redesignated Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323 (VMFA-323).
- July 1964 Redeployed to Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 24, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- April-May 1965 Participated in the Dominican Republic intervention, operating from Naval Air Station, Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico.

October - December 1965	Deployed to Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 11, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
December 1965 - February 1966	Participated in the Vietnam War, operating from Da Nang.
March - June 1966	Redeployed to Tainan Air Base, Taiwan.
June - July 1966	Redeployed to Iwakuni, Japan.
July 1966 - May 1967	Redeployed to Da Nang.
May - August 1967	Redeployed to Iwakuni.
August 1967 - March 1969	Redeployed to Chu Lai, Republic of Vietnam, for continued participation in the Vietnam War.
March 1969	Redeployed to Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 33, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.
November 1970	Reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 13.
July 1971	Reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 11.
November 1979 - June 1980	Participated in the Iranian crisis, operating from the USS <i>Coral Sea</i> (CV-43).
October 1985 - May 1986	Deployed for naval operations off the Libyan coast, operating from the USS <i>Coral Sea</i> (CV-43).

# Appendix B

## COMMANDING OFFICERS

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Maj George C. Axtell, Jr.....	1 Aug 1943 - 15 Jun 1945
Maj Martin E. W. Oelrich.....	16 Jun 1945 - 30 Sep 1945
Maj Lowell D. Grow.....	1 Oct 1945 - 31 Jan 1946
Maj William G. Voss.....	1 Feb 1946 - 9 Mar 1946
Maj Stanley R. Bailey.....	10 Mar 1946 - 8 Jan 1947
Maj John S. Payne.....	9 Jan 1947 - 25 Aug 1947
Maj William C. Humberd.....	26 Aug 1947 - 7 Mar 1948
LtCol William C. Humberd.....	8 Mar 1948 - 6 May 1948
Maj Robert C. Armstead.....	7 May 1948 - 30 Jun 1948
Maj Honore G. Dalton.....	1 Jul 1948 - 31 Mar 1949
Maj Elmer G. Glidden, Jr.....	1 Apr 1949 - 6 Mar 1950
Maj Robert E. Johnson.....	7 Mar 1950 - 6 Jul 1950
Maj Arnold A. Lund.....	7 Jul 1950 - 24 Jan 1951
Maj Stanley S. Nicolay.....	25 Jan 1951 - 23 Mar 1951
Maj Donald L. Clark.....	24 Mar 1951 - 2 May 1951
Maj Charles M. Kunz.....	3 May 1951 - 24 Sep 1951
LtCol George F. Vaughan.....	25 Sep 1951 - 24 Oct 1951
Maj John L. Dexter.....	25 Oct 1951 - 15 Jan 1952
LtCol Richard L. Blume.....	16 Jan 1952 - 25 Apr 1952
Maj William A. Weir.....	26 Apr 1952 - 31 May 1952
LtCol Henry S. Miller.....	1 Jun 1952 - 31 Aug 1952
LtCol Kenneth R. Chamberlain.....	1 Sep 1952 - 19 Nov 1952
LtCol Willard C. Lemke.....	20 Nov 1952 - 12 Jan 1953
LtCol William M. Frash.....	13 Jan 1953 - 10 Apr 1953
LtCol Clarence H. Moore.....	11 Apr 1953 - 26 Jun 1953
Maj Robert C. Woten.....	27 Jun 1953 - 5 Jul 1953
Capt Ted J. Foster.....	6 Jul 1953 - 13 Jul 1953
LtCol William M. Watkins.....	14 Jul 1953 - 16 Mar 1954
Maj William D. Armstrong.....	17 Mar 1954 - 29 Mar 1954
LtCol Robert G. Owens, Jr.....	30 Mar 1954 - 9 Aug 1954
LtCol Douglas A. Bangert.....	10 Aug 1954 - 23 Dec 1954
Maj Richard Hey, Jr.....	24 Dec 1954 - 10 Mar 1955
Maj Clyde H. Davis, Jr.....	11 Mar 1955 - 30 Mar 1955
LtCol Clyde H. Davis, Jr.....	1 Apr 1955 - 3 Aug 1955
LtCol Kenneth D. Frazier.....	4 Aug 1955 - 1 Oct 1956
LtCol Warren H. McPherson.....	2 Oct 1956 - 2 Jan 1957
LtCol Daniel L. Cummings.....	3 Jan 1957 - 18 Sep 1958
LtCol Floyd C. Haxton.....	19 Sep 1958 - 28 Jan 1959
LtCol Dwain L. Engel.....	29 Jan 1959 - 1 Dec 1959

LtCol Frank E. Wilson . . . . . 2 Dec 1959 - 10 Jun 1960  
 LtCol Robert E. Johnson . . . . . 11 Jun 1960 - 1 Jun 1961  
 LtCol Frederic T. Watts, Jr. . . . . 2 Jun 1961 - 15 Jul 1962  
 LtCol Claude O. Barnhill, Jr. . . . . 16 Jul 1962 - 4 May 1964  
 Maj Donald K. Tooker . . . . . 5 May 1964 - 30 Jun 1964  
 LtCol Norman W. Gourley . . . . . 1 Jul 1964 - 30 Jun 1965  
  
 LtCol Andrew W. O'Donnell . . . . . 1 Jul 1965 - 20 Jul 1966  
 LtCol A.W. Talbert . . . . . 21 Jul 1966 - 29 Jan 1967  
 LtCol Gordon H. Keller, Jr. . . . . 30 Jan 1967 - 15 Jul 1967  
 LtCol Edison W. Miller . . . . . 16 Jul 1967 - 13 Oct 1967  
 LtCol Harry T. Hagaman . . . . . 14 Oct 1967 - 16 May 1968  
  
 LtCol Don J. Slee . . . . . 17 May 1968 - 11 Dec 1968  
 LtCol Ira L. Morgan, Jr. . . . . 12 Dec 1968 - 25 Mar 1969  
 Maj Robert L. Bainbridge . . . . . 1 Apr 1969 - 31 Jul 1969  
 Maj Karl A. Zimmerman II . . . . . 1 Aug 1969 - 9 Aug 1970  
 LtCol Keith A. Smith . . . . . 10 Mar 1970 - 6 May 1970  
  
 LtCol Donald L. Waldvogel . . . . . 7 May 1970 - 31 May 1971  
 Maj Thomas G. Leach . . . . . 1 Jun 1971 - 30 Apr 1972  
 LtCol Thomas G. Leach . . . . . 1 May 1972 - 8 Jun 1972  
 LtCol Albert E. Brewster . . . . . 9 Jun 1972 - 28 Feb 1973  
 LtCol Michael P. Sullivan . . . . . 1 Mar 1973 - 2 Jul 1974  
  
 LtCol Don K. Hanna . . . . . 3 Jul 1974 - 3 Jul 1975  
 LtCol Michael R. McDonough . . . . . 4 Jul 1975 - 22 Jul 1976  
 LtCol William W. Mackey . . . . . 23 Jul 1976 - 26 May 1977  
 LtCol Hardy A. Slone . . . . . 27 May 1977 - 1 Aug 1978  
 LtCol David V. Denton . . . . . 2 Aug 1978 - 13 Aug 1980  
  
 LtCol Christian F. DeFries, Jr. . . . . 14 Aug 1980 - 3 Sep 1981  
 LtCol Jerry R. Cadick . . . . . 4 Sep 1981 - 10 Sep 1982  
 LtCol Gary R. Van Gysel . . . . . 11 Sep 1982 - 1 Jun 1984  
 LtCol Donald A. Beaufait . . . . . 2 Jun 1984 - 20 June 1986  
 LtCol Dennis T. Krupp . . . . . 21 Jun 1986 -

# Appendix C:

## HONORS

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### PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (NAVY) STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER STAR

Okinawa, 4 April-14 July 1945  
Korea, 7 August-7 September 1950  
Korea, 15 September-11 October 1950  
Korea, 3-6 August 1950, 8-14 September 1950, 12 October-26 November 1950, and 15 December 1950-1 August 1951  
Korea, 3 August-29 September 1951  
Vietnam, 2 December 1965-28 February 1966 and 5 July 1966-15 September 1967

### PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (ARMY) STREAMER

Korea, 22 November-14 December 1950

### NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Korea, 1 August 1952-6 July 1953  
Dominican Republic, 26-30 April 1965  
Vietnam, 15 September 1967-30 April 1968

### ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Okinawa Gunto, 2 April-14 July 1945  
3d Fleet Operations Against Japan, 15 July-15 August 1945

### WORLD WAR II VICTORY STREAMER

1 August 1943-31 December 1946

### NAVY OCCUPATION SERVICE STREAMER WITH "ASIA"

2 September 1945-6 February 1946

### NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

27 June 1950-27 July 1954  
1 January 1961-15 August 1974

### KOREAN SERVICE STREAMER WITH TWO SILVER STARS

North Korean Aggression, 5 August-2 November 1950  
Communist China Aggression, 3 November 1950-24 January 1951  
Inchon Landing, 13-17 September 1950  
First U. N. Counteroffensive, 25 January-21 April 1951  
Communist China Spring Offensive, 22 April-8 July 1951  
U. N. Summer-Fall Offensive, 9 July-27 November 1951  
Second Korean Winter, 28 November 1951-30 April 1952  
Korean Defense, Summer-Fall 1952, 1 May-30 November 1952

Third Korean Winter, 1 December 1952-30 April 1953  
Korea, Summer-Fall 1953, 1 May-6 July 1953

**ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY STREAMER**

Taiwan Straits, 31 August-12 September 1958

**VIETNAM SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER STAR AND FOUR BRONZE STARS**

Vietnam Defense Campaign, 2 December-24 December 1965  
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Campaign, 25 December 1965-1 March 1966  
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase II, 6 July 1966-31 May 1967  
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase III, 1 June 1967-29 January 1968  
Tet Counteroffensive, 30 January-1 April 1968  
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase IV, 2 April-30 June 1968  
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase V, 1 July-1 November 1968  
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase VI, 2 November 1968-22 February 1969  
Tet 69/Counteroffensive, 23 February-25 March 1969

**KOREAN PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER**

3 August 1950-26 February 1951; 27 February 1951-11 June 1953

**VIETNAM CROSS OF GALLANTRY STREAMER WITH PALM**

2 December 1965-25 March 1969

# Appendix D

## GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE AIRCRAFT CODE NAMES AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION

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In 1942 a member of the Directorate of Intelligence, Allied Air Forces, Southwest Pacific Area, Captain Frank T. McCoy, Jr., USAAF, devised a code name system for identifying Japanese aircraft. The names were selected on the following basis:

*Male first names:* Fighters (Army and Navy, single- and twin-engined). Reconnaissance seaplanes.

*Female first names:* Bombers, attack bombers, and dive-bombers. Reconnaissance aircraft (land- or carrier-based). Flying-boats. Transports (names beginning with the letter T).

*Tree names:* Trainers.

*Bird names:* Gliders.

### Aircraft specifically mentioned in this squadron history\*

**Betty**—A twin-engined, all-metal construction aircraft with fabric-covered control surfaces built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Company. It was used in various versions as a land-based bomber (G4M), heavy escort fighter (G6M1), bomber crew trainer (G6M1-K), and transport (G6M1-L2).

**Zeke**—A single-engine, low-wing, carrier-capable fighter which featured all-metal construction with fabric covered control surfaces. The A6M Reisen (Zero Fighter), as it was known to the Japanese, was designed by Mitsubishi, and built by both Mitsubishi and the Nakajima Airplane Company.

**Jack**—A single-engine, low-wing, land-based interceptor fighter which featured all-metal construction with fabric-covered control surfaces. It was designed by Mitsubishi as the J2M Raiden (Thunderbolt).

**Tony**—A liquid-cooled, single-engine, low-wing, land-based fighter which featured all-metal construction with fabric-covered control surfaces. Designated as the Ki-61 Hien (Swallow) by the Japanese, it was designed and built by the Kawasaki Aircraft Engineering Company.

**Val**—A single-engine, low-wing, fixed-gear, carrier-based dive-bomber which featured all-metal construction with fabric-covered control surfaces. The aircraft, designated the D3A



by the Japanese, was designed by the Aichi Aircraft Company and built by Aichi and the Showa Airplane Company.

**Tojo**—A single-engine, low-wing, land-based, interceptor fighter which featured all-metal construction with fabric-covered control surfaces. The aircraft, designated the Ki-44 Shoki (Devil-Queller) by the Japanese, was designed and built by the Nakajima Airplane Company. (It should also be noted that the Allied code name of Tojo which was used for this aircraft was one of several exceptions to the normal naming pattern).

**Kate**—A single-engine, low-wing, carrier-based torpedo-bomber which featured all-metal construction with fabric covered control surfaces. The Allies designated the B5N produced by Nakajima as the Kate, and the B5M1 produced by Mitsubishi as the Kate 61 (formerly the Mabel).

**Nate**—A single-engine, low-wing, fixed-gear, cantilever monoplane which featured all-metal construction with fabric-covered control surfaces. Designed and built by Nakajima as the Ki-27 for use as a fighter, by the end of the war this plane was being used primarily as a trainer or as a *kamikaze* attack aircraft.

**Judy**—A single-engine, carrier-capable monoplane which featured all metal construction with fabric-covered control surfaces. Designed by Naval engineers at Yokosuka, the D4Y Suisei (Comet), as it was designated by the Japanese, had various versions built at the Naval Air Arsenals in Yokosuka and Hiro, as well as by the Aichi Aircraft Company. Extremely versatile, this aircraft was used as a dive-bomber, reconnaissance plane, land-based night fighter, and *kamikaze* aircraft.

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\*Information for this glossary was obtained from Rene J. Francillon, *Japanese Aircraft of the Pacific War*, 2nd ed. (London: Putnam & Company, 1979).

# Appendix E

## ACES OF VMF-323

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During the Okinawa Campaign of 1945 VMF-323 saw 12 of its pilots gain the distinction of being known as an "Ace."\* In the order of their aerial victories, they are:

Ace	Kills
1stLt Jeremiah J. O'Keefe	7
1stLt John W. Ruhsam	7
1stLt Robert Wade	7
1stLt Joseph V. Dillard	6 ½
1stLt Dewey F. Durnford	6 ½
Maj George C. Axtell, Jr.	6
Maj Jefferson D. Dorrah, Jr.	6
1stLt William L. Hood	5 ½
1stLt Stuart C. Alley, Jr.	5
1stLt Charles W. Drake	5
1stLt Albert P. Wells	5

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\*An "Ace" is generally recognized as a pilot who achieves five aerial victories in combat. Although the Marine Corps does not maintain an official list of aces, there is official documentation which identifies Marine aviators with the count of their aerial victories.

# Appendix F

## VMF-323's SONG

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Although the tune for this song is sometimes claimed for the Army Air Corps, the origins of the lyrics are in the the U.S. Marine Corps and VMF-323 in particular.

### HINKY DI

Up in Korea midst high rocks and snow,  
The poor Chinese Commie is feeling quite low.  
For as the Corsairs roar by overhead,  
He knows that his buddies all soon will be dead.

*CHORUS (repeat after each verse)*

*Hinky di Dinky Dinky di*

*Hinky di Dinky Dinky di*

Lin Pao went way up to cold Kato Ri,  
His prize Chinese army in action to see.  
He got there a half hour after the "U's,"  
And all that he found was their hats and their shoes.

Run, little chink men, save your ass, run,  
For 323 is out looking for fun.  
As the big white-nosed Corsairs come down in their dives,  
You'll know the Death Rattlers are after your lives.

Uncle Joe Stalin, your stooges have found,  
It just doesn't pay to invade foreign ground.  
For when they disturbed the serene morning calm,  
They brought on the rockets, bombs and napalm.

Here's to the 2-C, the Vought people too,  
And their well-known product, the blue F4U.  
To all gyrene pilots and carriers at sea,  
And to the Death Rattlers Squadron, ol' 323.

We fought at Pyongyang and Hagaru,  
At Kumbawa and Kaesand and Oyangbu.  
So here's to our pilots, and here's to our crew,  
The target, the snake and the blue F4U.

# Appendix G

## SQUADRON INSIGNIA

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Marine Fighting Squadron 323 picked up its “Death Rattlers” nickname soon after commissioning in 1943, and the rattlesnake has been a major element in the unit’s insignia designs ever since.

In the squadron’s 1943 request for approval of the original insignia, the thought behind the design was explained in the following fashion:

The circle is for the solidarity of the Squadron, a compact, well rounded-out unit. The rattle-snake represents the vicious striking power of the airplane we will fly into combat [the Vought F4U Corsair]. The most distinctive feature of that airplane [its inverted gull wing silhouette] is shown in the lower right section of the insignia.

In the ensuing 40 years the “basic” Death Rattlers design has been adhered to with one significant exception. In 1959 a redesigned insignia reflecting VMF-323’s use of the Vought F8U Crusader was submitted to the Chief of Naval Operations and duly authorized.

Use of the “Crusader motif” was short-lived, however. In 1962 the squadron returned to the basic design because of a desire for “restoring historical continuity.”

The Death Rattlers coiled-snake design has seen use in more than merely its official insignia. As the following photographs show, aircraft have been adorned with Death Rattlers stencils, squadron duty officers have worn Death Rattlers armbands, and a Death Rattler pennant was flown at the squadron’s field headquarters during the Korean War.

Although difficult to put into words, expressions of unit identification such as these define a sense of esprit de corps and are hallmarks of the best combat units.



Photo courtesy of LtCol Daniel L. Cummings, USMC (Ret)



Photo courtesy of Maj James W. Kirk, USMC (Ret)

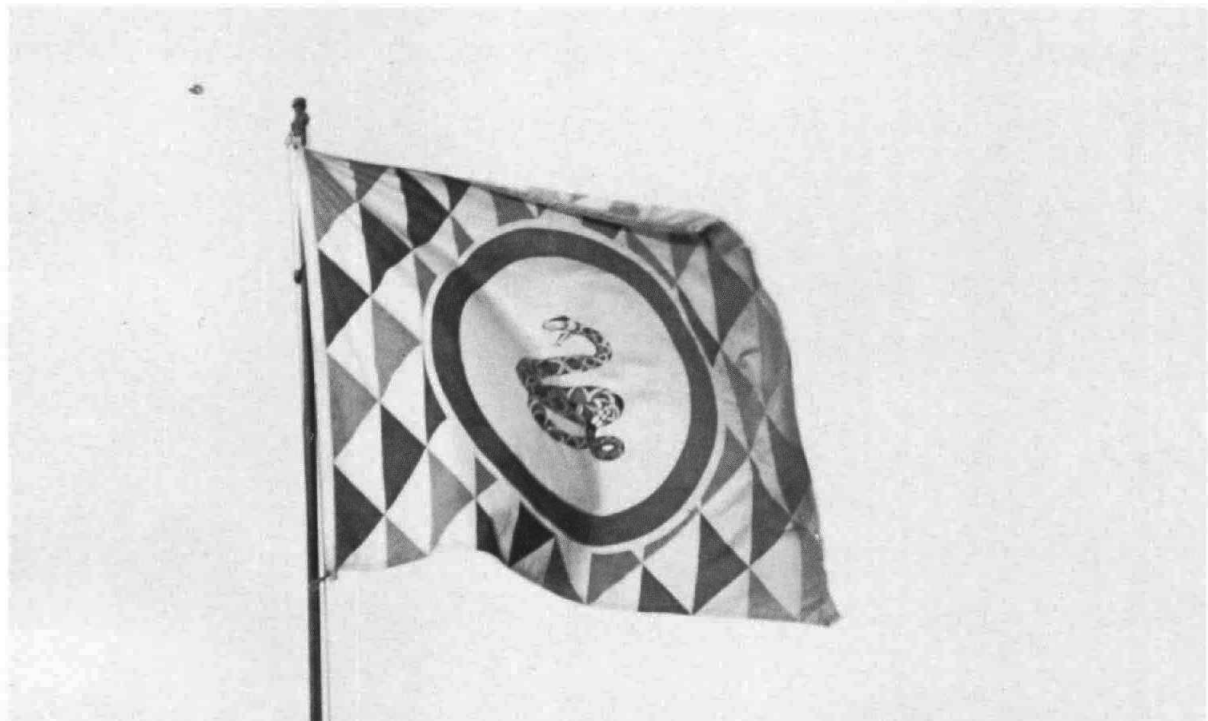


Photo courtesy of LtCol Daniel L. Cummings, USMC (Ret)

*LtCol Daniel L. Cummings, top left, VMFA-323 commanding officer, poses in January 1958 with Death Rattler-stencilled aircraft at NAS Atsugi, Japan. LtCol Cummings, top right, briefs squadron duty officer wearing a Death Rattler armband. The Death Rattler also appears at center of a pennant, above, flown at squadron headquarters during the Korean War.*

*A squadron insignia of VMFA-323 is shown on the back cover. For a history of the insignia and other illustrations see Appendix G.*

