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From: Commanding Officer, Strike Fighter Squadron 25  
To: Director of Naval History, Washington Navy Yard (OP-09BH)

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1. In compliance with reference (a), enclosure (1) is forwarded.

*A. V. Colantoni*  
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Reg # R134 064 418

*Logged*



NOTE  
(Bio of CO is  
included in narrative)

## **COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION**

### **MISSION**

The mission of Strike Fighter Squadron Twenty Five is to maintain a maximum of air combat readiness in the Carrier Striking Forces and to utilize that readiness as a deterrent or striking capability against any and all enemies of the United States of America as may be directed by higher authority. The primary function of Strike Fighter Squadron Twenty Five within that mission is to conduct offensive air-to-air and air-to-surface strike operations.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

VFA-25 is one of two FA-18 fleet squadrons under the functional command of the Commander, Light Attack Wing, U. S. Pacific Fleet based ashore at Naval Air Station Lemoore, California. Operational Control is provided by the Commander Carrier Air Wing Fourteen which deployed aboard the USS Constellation (CV-64) for a six month Western Pacific and Indian Ocean cruise during 1987.

### **COMMANDING OFFICER**

Commander Jerome L. Arbiter assumed command in February of 1986. Commander Arbiter entered the Naval Service in 1968 after graduating from the University of Colorado with a degree in Civil Engineering. He completed flight training and was designated a Naval Aviator in April 1970.

In January 1971, he reported to VA-155. During this tour, he completed two combat deployments flying A-7B's from the USS Oriskany.

In July 1973, Commander Arbiter reported to VA-125 as Landing Signal Officer and Instructor Pilot.

In February 1979, Commander Arbiter became the Staff Landing Signal Officer for the Commander, Naval Air Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet. In August of 1981, he reported to VA-192 where he completed deployments and carrier operations on USS America and USS Ranger.

In December of 1983, Commander Arbiter reported to VFA-125 for transition training to the FA-18 Hornet. Upon completion of training in October of 1984, he reported to VFA-25, "The Fist of the Fleet" as Executive Officer.

Commander Arbiter's flight experience includes 218 combat missions and over 800 carrier landings.

#### **CHRONOLOGY 1987**

**10 January** After an extended holiday leave period following the 1986 NORPAC Cruise to Vancouver and Anchorage, VFA-25 got down to serious business and began its 1987 Training Cycle.

**13 January** Conventional Weapons Technical Proficiency Inspection. Pilot open/closed book exam scores averaged 98.9%. Enlisted written exam scores were a LATWING high of 95.7%.

**21 January - 10 February** Squadron participated in Readix 87-2 where pilots carrier qualified on the USS Constellation and participated in Battle Group Delta Operations.

**3 February** Electronic Warfare Technical Proficiency Inspection. During the Battle Group Evaluation, VFA-25's Electronic Warfare Program was cited as outstanding.

**7 February** During the Battle Group Evaluation, LCDR [REDACTED] and LCDR [REDACTED] fired an AIM-7 Sparrow and an AIM-9 Sidewinder respectively. Both were scored as lethal hits.

**13 March** Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection where the Fists flawless weapons loads and attention to detail resulted in no discrepancies and individual grades of outstanding.

**16-17 March** Five Fists participate in a missile shoot at NWC China Lake, proving the Hornet's sting by destroying all drones.

**18-20 March** Pre-deployment aircraft material condition inspection.

**11 April** "Fist of the Fleet" deploys aboard USS Constellation headed for the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean.

**13 April - 1 May** TRANSITEX 87-4, VFA-25 flew various missions enroute to Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines. Fist pilots shared alert 5 status with her sister squadron and two F-14 squadrons during Battle Group Delta's transit through the "Bear Box".

**2 May** USS Constellation arrives in Subic Bay for a five day working in-port period.

**11 May** PASSEX (Singapore) where the Fists participated in Aerial Combat Training Missions against the Singapore Air Force.

**13 May** PASSEX (Malaysia) VFA-25 participated in multiple joint operations with the Malaysia Air Force while heading West into the Indian Ocean. Malaysian observers at Song Song target were impressed by one Hornet's CEP of 28 feet.

**18 May** Fists complete first line period leading Airwing Fourteen with a 3.46 overall squadron landing average.

**19 May - 23 May** USS Constellation anchored in Diego Garcia Bay. Squadron pilots enjoyed excellent training while based ashore.

**24 May** USS Constellation and Battle Group Delta executes an emergency sortie after the USS Stark is attacked by an Iraqi jet.

**29 May - 11 June** USS Constellation anchored Diego Garcia. Commander Arbiter became the first pilot to successfully trap aboard an aircraft carrier at anchor flying the FA-18.

**11 June - 15 June** A four day at sea period for pilot refresher conducted off Diego Garcia.

**15 June - 20 June** USS Constellation anchored at Diego Garcia.

**21 June** Battle Group Delta departs Diego Garcia and heads for the North Arabian Sea, due to heightening tensions between Iraq and Iran.

**22 June - 25 June** Fists participate in USS Constellation's weapons week enroute to the North Arabian Sea.

**July - August** On several occasions, VFA-25 provided air cover for reflagged tankers transiting the Straits of Hormuz, involving continuous flight operations lasting in excess of 20 hours.

**6 July** F1st pilots take top honors in Tailhook competition for the second line period with an overall landing grade average of 3.60.

**27 August** After almost 80 days at sea, the USS Constellation is relieved by USS Ranger and headed south for Perth, Australia.

**2 September** VFA-25 changed Commanding Officers as Commander Anthony V. Colantoni, Jr., relieved Commander Jerome L. Arbiter while at sea.

**7 September** The F1sts arrive in Perth, Australia and enjoyed 7 days of liberty.

**14 September** USS Constellation and Battle Group Delta depart Perth bound for Subic Bay.

**24 September** The F1sts arrive in Subic Bay for a two day port visit before departing for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

**27 September** VFA-25 completes its Post-cruise aircraft material condition inspection, including 7 commendatory items cited by inspectors.

**2 October** F1sts are recognized as Top Hook squadron for the cruise with an overall 3.54 average. LCDR [REDACTED] [REDACTED] is recognized as the number one overall Top Hook with a 3.82 landing grade average and a 100% boarding rate.

**7 October** USS Constellation arrives in Hawaii to pick up family members for a 6 day "Tiger" Cruise.

**13 October** USS Constellation arrives in San Diego, CA., and VFA-25 sailors disembark after a long 6 month deployment.

**20 November** Command Inspection (ADMAT), VFA-25 was cited for 26 commendatory items.

**9 December** Fists complete a NATOPS Unit Evaluation with an overall grade of "outstanding".

**14 December** Squadron takes some time off for family and friends, looking forward to the New Year and its challenges.

## **NARRATIVE**

In January 1987, VFA-25 was in the final phase of workups for its deployment with Air Wing Fourteen aboard USS Constellation. The two week at-sea period tested the squadron pilots on advanced battle group operations and tactics.

In February and March squadron pilots were rewarded for their hard work and dedication scoring successful hits on Navy drones with air-to-air missiles. The end of March saw nearly a fifty percent turnover of junior officers as five new aviators reported onboard only weeks before the 1987 cruise.

The "Fists" departed on April 11th, transiting the Pacific Ocean for Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines, arriving on May 2nd. The 5 day working in-port period went by quickly and the USS Constellation was soon heading further west to the Indian Ocean after a transit through the Straits of Malacca. The British Indian Ocean Territory of Diego Garcia became a familiar location for the Battle Group as they alternated between sea time and anchor time from May 21st to June 21st. The "Fists" enjoyed the excellent training associated with working from an airfield, along with becoming the first Hornet squadron to land on a carrier while at anchor.

Flying at anchor, "flanchor", could only be accomplished if stringent aircraft gross weight and wind over the deck requirements were met. Squadron members were able to make good use of the recreational facilities on the island such as fishing, sailing, swimming and other popular sports.

As tensions mounted in the North Arabian Sea, the Battle Group was called into action and departed Diego Garcia on June 21st. This marked the beginning of a very challenging period of extended operations for all squadron members. The air wing provided cover for ships transiting the Straits of Hormuz, which often involved continuous flight operations lasting in excess of 20 hours. News of the USS Ranger's transit became a high interest item, as everyone eagerly awaited its welcome relief.

On August 27th relief came as the USS Constellation passed close aboard with the USS Ranger and its battle group, which arrived on schedule to assume the naval presence in the North Arabian Sea. Spirits soared on board "America's Flagship", as it's first liberty port was only 10 days away! During the transit south, the "Fist of the Fleet" changed commanding officers, as Commander Anthony V. Colantoni, relieved Commander Jerome L. Arbiter, on September 2nd.

Commander Anthony V. Colantoni, Jr., entered the Naval Service in 1969 upon graduation from the United States Naval Academy where he earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Systems Engineering. After completing flight training at Naval Air Station, Kingsville, Texas, he was designated a Naval Aviator and received his wings in February 1971. In September 1971, he reported to VAL-4 flying OV-10's out in Binh Thuy, RVN.



In April 1972, Commander Colantoni reported back to Naval Air Station, Kingsville as an instructor pilot with VT-22. In June 1974, he reported to Naval Air Station, Lemoore, California., undergoing instruction at VA-127 in the A-4F and subsequently reported to VA-16 deployed onboard USS Hancock (CV-19) for her last WESTPAC cruise.

In January 1975, Commander Colantoni again reported to VA-127 as an instructor pilot during 127's transition to an adversary squadron. In August 1978, he underwent transition training in the A-7E at VA-122 and reported to VA-56 deployed onboard USS Midway (CV-41) permanently homeported in Yokosuka, Japan. Commander Colantoni served as the Administrative/Operations Officer of VA-56 until October 1981 and made four Indian Ocean Deployments during his tour.

In March 1982, Commander Colantoni reported to CVW-9 as the Air Wing Operations Officer completing deployments on USS Constellation (CV-64) and USS Ranger (CV-61). His next tour of duty was as a student at the Naval War College, Newport, R.I., from August 1984 to July 1985. He reported to VFA-125 in October 1985 for transition training in the FA-18 and assumed the duties as Executive Officer of VFA-25 in February 1986.

On September 7th, the USS Constellation anchored just off the shore of Perth, Western Australia for 7 days of liberty in what some believe to be the best liberty port in WESTPAC. All hands took full advantage of numerous tours, beautiful city sights, and of course, the wonderful Australian hospitality.

The USS Constellation departed Perth for the Republic of the Philippines on September 14th.

Pearl Harbor was the final stop on October 7th where squadron personnel welcomed aboard family members for a 6 day Tiger Cruise.

"Tigers" experienced life at sea along with observing displays by Battle Group ships and Air Wing aircraft. October 13th marked the end of a successful and rewarding cruise for VFA-25. The squadron aviators distinguished themselves as top tailhookers for the deployment by receiving the Golden Tailhook Award. The Maintenance Department accomplished several outstanding feats; providing over 700 sorties with a 100% completion rate and over 1600 accident free flight hours. All hands take great pride in these achievements, for they signify the tremendous talent, teamwork and dedication which characterizes a successful command.

During October and November, the squadron dedicated its efforts toward the upcoming command inspection scheduled for 20 November and the NATOPS Evaluation slated for 9 December. The slow pace of flight operations on the return from the Indian Ocean warranted a turnaround training plan that started from ground zero to build up pilot proficiency.

In December the operations tempo virtually came to a halt as major defects in the FA-18 engines surfaced, grounding the entire fleet of Hornets. This setback was overcome through the creative use of the sophisticated FA-18 Weapons Training Simulators located at Naval Air Station, Lemoore, California.

1987 came to a close with all hands grateful to be home with their families.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**