

## **VMCJ-1 ON THE ROAD AGAIN**

by Col. H. Wayne Whitten USMC (Ret)

***PROLOGUE: The following is a personalized history of VMCJ-1 from May 1970 until April 1972 written primarily from official Command Chronologies and personal recollections, orders and logbooks of the author and members of the squadron, notably Major Terry Miner USMC (Ret) and former Capt. Jack Metrock. It covers the tenure of four commanding officers and is dedicated to the late Lt. Col. Gene Smith who led the squadron as it got back “on the road again” after 5 years in Vietnam.***

By May 1970 the draw down of U.S. forces in Vietnam was well under way as the Nixon administration pursued its Vietnamization strategy. After five years in Vietnam, VMCJ-1 received orders to stand down on 1 July and prepare to return to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Although the 1<sup>st</sup> MAW would remain in country for another year, the separate 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Rear) under BGen Robert F. Conley was already in place at Iwakuni with two fixed-wing groups, MAG-12 and MAG-15. The squadron CO was Lt. Col. Paul A. “Skip” Manning who was the executive officer of VMCJ-1 when it deployed to Danang, RVN in April, 1965. Manning was OIC of the VMCJ-1 Yankee Team detachment on the USS Coral Sea on 13 August 1965 when his RF-8A was critically damaged by AAA while photographing a NVN radar site. He was able to safely eject out at sea from the first VMCJ-1 aircraft lost to hostile fire.

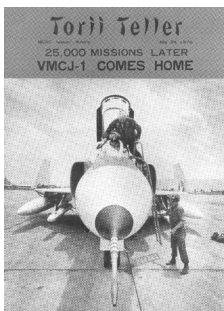
Before redeploying, the squadron had 10 RF-4Bs and 11 EA-6As assigned, but five of the EA-6As were to be returned to CONUS and transferred to VMCJ-2. The squadron’s high material readiness and average aircraft availability supported a record setting operations schedule during the last two months of combat. In May the squadron’s EA-6As had provided ECM support for a series of attacks into the NVN panhandle against major supply dumps as well as AAA and SAM sites under the guise of “protective reaction” strikes in defense of reconnaissance aircraft. They were the first open attacks into NVN since the 1968 bombing halt. The squadron would depart Danang having flown over 25,000 sorties with four different aircraft types (EF-10B, RF-8A, EA-6A, RF-4B), the last 11,297 hours accident free. In addition, over 1000 RF-8A sorties were flown during 1964-65 from TF-77 aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin. What would be the last RF-4B combat mission was a night IR sortie flown on 30 June by Capt. Gerald Miller and 1/Lt. Bill Cooper. Miller would end his career as a BGen and JAG of the Marine Corps. The last combat mission of VMCJ-1 while permanently based at Danang was an EA-6A ESM sortie flown by Major Jerry Foote and Capt. Darrell Cook later that night.

The closure of this phase of VMCJ-1's illustrious history was marked by a 15 July farewell ceremony on the flight line attended by Lt. Gen. Keith McCutcheon, CG III MAF, and Maj. Gen. Alan Armstrong, CG 1<sup>st</sup> MAW who provided congratulatory remarks. I proudly remember then assistant wing commander BGen McCutcheon coming onboard our aircraft to welcome Lt. Col. Rocky Opeka's J-1 cadre to Danang on 1 November 1965. The ceremony was concluded by a flyover of the five EA-6As departing for CONUS and shortly afterwards at 0001Z Lt. Col. Manning led a flight of 4 RF-4Bs out of Danang for the last time. The EA-6As followed on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

I joined the 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Rear) staff in mid June as the EWO under the AC/S G-3, relieving Capt. Duke Steinken with a 6 week overlap. Later that month, Capt. Jim Doyle the 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Danang) EWO brought his classified files up to Iwakuni and affected a turnover on his way back to CONUS. It was evident that there was a need to develop a plan to get VMCJ-1 back into a productive training environment so the operational experience gained from over 5 years in Vietnam was not lost. This need was most critical with the EA-6As as they had a state-of-the-art ECM capability proven in combat and considered national assets. With nothing left of VMCJ-1's pre-Vietnam peacetime operational environment except memories and a professional reputation, there were many challenges ahead.

Establishing liaison with the various U.S. and allied forces and activities in the region was a must. Duke and I started that process with a liaison visit to Itazuke AB to meet with the JSDF air control and air defense staff and their U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> AF counterparts. Our cross briefing gave them a feel for the ECM training the squadron would be able to provide them and in turn we learned about the restrictions the EA-6As would have to operate under while in their airspace and procedures for obtaining jamming clearances.

On 17 July, 1970 Lt. Col. Manning flying an RF-4B led the squadron's return to MCAS Iwakuni, where it would join MAG-12, the "Ready Group", with its 6 EA-6As and 10 RF4-Bs. Back at Danang, the squadron's vast maintenance and avionics equipment along with logistics and administrative items were embarked aboard the USS Denver and USS Durham under leadership of CWO-3 Pete Stavros, the squadron avionics officer. These ships would arrive at Iwakuni on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of July. After some hassle, Pete made it out with a C-130 load of classified material to wrap-up VMCJ-1's Vietnam stay.



**Lt. Col. Manning Arriving at Iwakuni 17 July, 1970**

Soon after its arrival, the squadron's operational readiness dropped well below the standard set in Vietnam with its priority for logistics support reverting to a peacetime vice wartime posture. Back in CONUS, VM CJ-3 was transitioning to the EA-6A after the last EF-10B departed in June. VM CJ-2 was planning for a 4 plane detachment to begin workups with a Navy air wing in the Fall to support the first EA-6A carrier deployment aboard the USS Forestal in January, 1971. The hard fact was the logistics pipeline could not support three operational sites let alone four especially with the high tempo operations in Vietnam having depleted and degraded the USMC peculiar avionics systems. Things were not much better with the RF-4Bs. To make matters worse, the necessary hangar, working and billeting spaces at Iwakuni were found to be inadequate. Most of the squadron's equipment and supplies brought up by ships in late July was still awaiting permanent locations well into August. It took another month before the necessary electrical power was available for the IMA vans supporting the mission critical systems for both aircraft. Supply support under MAG-12 continued to be a problem for months to come. It was this daunting situation that faced Lt. Col. Charles E. "Gene" Smith Jr. when he took command on 19 September.

As I recall one of the new CO's first challenges was to secure his aircraft and equipment when Iwakuni was hit by typhoons on two consecutive weekends. There was no room for hangar queens and getting the aircraft into flyaway condition was a problem exasperated by having to recover some of them from safe havens not once but twice. He also had to deal with an influx of new first tour aircrews for both aircraft and despite a nucleus of experienced and capable officers at the department head level overall operational proficiency declined for several months. Perhaps as a footnote to the limited flight schedules, two of VM CJ-1's aircrews, Capts. Jerry Miller and Denny Springer, became key volunteer staff members of MCAS Iwakuni's television station. I thought Jerry Miller had a chance to be a great weatherman or news anchor if his day job didn't work out, and now Denny's a docent and photographer for the Marine Corps Heritage Museum! Despite only arriving in July, the squadron's young studs quickly took the measure of the other units and went on to win the station's athletic championship for 1970.

Despite the poor readiness posture of the newly arrived squadron, planning for an increasing tempo of operational training missions continued even as we were alerted to some Navy contingency plans requiring EA-6A support. Although VM CJ-1's EA-6A's had been providing near exclusive support to TF-77's air operations, VADM Weisner, COMSEVENTHFLT felt the Navy was not informed about the withdrawal of the squadron from Danang by COMUSMACV and the Marine Corps until it was too late to intervene. The admiral made it clear to his staff who relayed the message to us that for any future contingencies "his" EA-6As would remain under Navy operational control. A not so subtle reminder that we were still at war in Vietnam and the EA-6As were likely going to be needed again was delivered in person by the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet N-3 and EWO during an early September visit with BGen Conley. Other than the CG, only the Wing AC/S G-2 and I attended the meeting due to security clearance requirements. We were told to have

2-4 EA-6As ready to quickly redeploy for unspecified short duration missions in support of and under operational control of TF-77. With CVA basing ruled out as not feasible at that time, it was decided to use NAS Cubi Pt. as the main deployment base and cycle the aircraft through Danang for refueling. Tasking and briefing support at Danang would be handled via the VQ-1 detachment. I was directed to keep in close contact with Cdr. Bob Hullander, the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet EWO, and keep him informed of the readiness posture of the EA-6As. Given this contingency environment, a decision was made to keep the squadron under de facto operational control of the wing which at times was not well received by the MAG-12 CO. As the G-3 EWO, I was caught squarely in middle when coordinating planning directly with the squadron, often following up with tasking messages with the group as an info vice action addressee.

Our close working relationship with the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet staff paid off as we quickly established a mutual beneficial ECM/ECCM training program with surface combatants in transit from Yokosuka to their stations in the South China Sea or Gulf of Tonkin. We were able to set up standing procedures for requesting and coordinating these training events to make them a routine part of the VMCJ-1 flight schedule. Some of the earliest ECM training missions were flown from Iwakuni against the destroyers USS King and Wainwright. The Wainwright, DLG-28, was later one of the PIRAZ ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. That is not to say that glitches did not occur. Since there was no opportunity for face to face briefings and debriefs between the ships and aircrews our procedures called for use of secure UHF communications during the jamming exercises. That meant that VMCJ-1 had to get their seldom used KY-28 encryption equipment in working order and both parties needed to load the same daily keys to be able to synch the radios in a secure mode. The combination proved easier said than done and several of the early missions wound up being run in the clear with less than desirable results. Once the radios were made operable, getting the ships and aircraft to load the same keys required more staff coordination. Unbeknownst to the squadron the ships changed their daily keys using the schedule times posted by TF-77 which differed from the schedule proscribed for operations in the northern operating areas that 1<sup>st</sup> MAF (Rear) units used. Once those issues were worked out the value of the training for both ships and aircrews went up significantly. The early experience gained from working against some of the most sophisticated shipboard radars in the world with outstanding ECCM capabilities proved instrumental in the squadron being extended an invitation in December to participate in a large Australian fleet anti-air warfare exercise.

Prior to deploying to Vietnam, a key element in VMCJ-1's EW operations with their EF-10Bs involved the Sharkfin missions flown under the Peacetime Aerial Reconnaissance Program (PARPRO). These missions, flown on approved tracks around the periphery, provided valuable aircrew training as well as contributing to the national ELINT database. By 1970 the Sharkfin mission authorization had not only expired but due to the loss of the USS Pueblo and VQ-1's EC-121 off North Korea in 1969, the sensitive PARPRO program came under increased scrutiny at the highest levels. Before

leaving the CINCPAC Joint Reconnaissance Center in December, 1969 I managed to get several new tracks for EA-6As conditionally approved under a new program called Beaver Hound. Understandably, they were not as aggressive as the old Sharkfins tracks, but were better than nothing which was the initial response to the request initiated by a Marine captain!

In mid September I flew to Osan AB Korea with Major John Watson, then the assistant S-3 and later squadron maintenance officer, for a liaison visit to the COMUSK staff. We were seeking the joint command's support to initiate Beaver Hound missions and join their Commando Jade exercise schedule with both the EA-6As and RF-4Bs. Our cross briefs and coordination resulted in yet another door opening for VM CJ-1 to broaden its training environment. It was evident from our side discussions with the ROK air force that VM CJ-1's professional reputation dating back to 1958 was still in tact and we were welcomed back. As a result of our meeting, 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Rear) officially requested authorization to schedule Beaver Hound missions on the approved Korean tracks. This request was approved and I along with a squadron representative began attending the monthly PARPRO conferences chaired by the CINCPAC JRC usually hosted by the PACOM ELINT Center at Fuchu AB. The first Beaver Hound mission was flown the next month. Initially, only one or two missions were flown on a monthly basis on the tracks which were less than ideal for signal interception. The resulting take provided the squadron's TSQ-90 analysts with a welcome challenge to produce some viable ELINT. As a result Beaver Hound provided the squadron a sense of being recognized within the intelligence community and instilled a measure of professional pride in the aircrews as they successfully planned and executed these missions with their rigid and time sensitive reporting requirements. VM CJ-1 was back on the road again!

Later, the CG 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Rear) received an invite for a representative to attend the DOD sponsored EW symposium at El Toro in late October in conjunction with the Association of Old Crows annual convention as the Marine Corps was to be recognized for its significant contributions to EW operations over NVN. In addition there was a related request for a squadron representative to present a technical paper on the EA-6A at the Joint EW Conference at the Naval Missile Center, Pt. Mugu, CA. early in December. These requests were orchestrated by Capt. Paul "Toje" Wheeler, the Marine Corps EW projects officer at Pt. Mugu and member of the convention host committee at MCAS El Toro. CGFMFPAC had endorsed these trips and since the squadron now belonged to 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Rear), the AC/S G-3 approved travel orders for me to attend the El Toro event. The squadron S-3, Major Ed Perron, a former Pt. Mugu projects officer, designated 1/Lt. Jim Mays an ECMO with a strong technical background to give a paper based on his work to improve the operational utility of the EA-6A's AN/TSQ-90 signal processing and analysis facility. These events like others to follow kept VM CJ-1 and the Marine Corps at the forefront of the rapidly evolving EW scene, and reinforced the belief that the combat proven EA-6As were indeed national assets.

During my previous tour at the CINCPAC JRC I had occasion to work with the staff of the Commander U.S. Taiwan Defense Command on a classified project and became familiar with the operating environment there. During the PARPRO conference in October, I was invited by the COMUSTDC representative to visit the command and brief the staff on VM CJ-1's capabilities with respect to participating in some of their exercises. In early November, I met in Taipei with the COMUSTDC staff and as a result secured the squadron an invite to participate in the quarterly air defense exercises named Eagle, which up to that point only involved 5<sup>th</sup> AF units on the U.S. side. We were offered to use Tainan AB on the NW coast near Kaoshiung as a deployment site which also had a small U.S. Navy detachment associated with the Air Asia aircraft rework facility. I was flown down to Tainan AB to do a preliminary site survey by Capt. Marty Brush, a Marine A-6 pilot on the staff. No doubt inspired by the following VM CJ-1 operations, he later transitioned into the EA-6A at VM CJ-2 and remained with the EA-6s for the rest of his career. *(As a major, he was OIC of VM CJ-1 Det 101 on the USS Midway, cross decking to the USS Coral Sea during the fall of Saigon where he flew the last EA-6A mission over Vietnam on 30 April, 1975 with Capt. Kenny Watts. He was a CO of VMAQ-2 during the transition to the EA-6Bs at MCAS Cherry Pt. in 1979.)*

Marty and I met with the Navy detachment OIC, a Lcdr. with a history, having been caught flat-hatting over San Diego and other no-nos resulting in his banishment to this obscure assignment, which turned out about as good as it gets in the U.S. Navy! He had made good friends with the ROC AF general who commanded the base and he and his sailors were afforded some unofficial "amenities" not the least of which was near free booze of the highest quality which he retailed at a quarter a shot at his club. He extended a hearty welcome to us and our Marines that followed. Without question, the officers and troops participating in the Eagle exercises would covet their TDY more than any other in the 1stMAW and it was exclusively for VM CJ-1 as no other units were allowed in! The free play exercises against a formidable air defense allowed a rare opportunity for the EA-6A aircrews to fully employ their ECM assets including chaff drops and hone their tactical skills. The post-exercise debriefs were highly professional and feedback was very candid. After the formal debriefs, the aircrews were invited to a lavish traditional Chinese dinner hosted on a rotational basis by each of the Taiwan service arms in Taipei. A mandatory no-fly day followed this cultural exchange out of operational necessity!

During a visit to Iwakuni on 17 November the deputy CG FMFPAC, Maj Gen Adams, presented the squadron the CNO Aviation Safety award for fiscal year 1970. On the same day I arrived at Camp John Hay near Bagiuo, in northern Luzon along with the S-3 of MACS-1 on Okinawa to attend a 3 day anti-air warfare conference setup by 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. When I came in through NAS Cubi Pt., I thought it unusual that there were two aircraft carriers in port at Subic Bay. These conferences were usually well attended by senior staff officers but on this occasion the only captain there was a 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet staff officer who kicked off the meeting before excusing himself and returning to Cubi. There was

speculation about why there only mid level attendees but we concluded it was the weather as unfortunately Typhoon Patsy was to hit the Manila area on the 19<sup>th</sup> and the ships would have had to go to sea.

We had to remain overnight on the 19<sup>th</sup> due to the weather but were able to catch an HU-16 back to Cubi Pt. late in the afternoon of 20 November. As we approached Cubi Pt. shortly after 1800 I noticed the two aircraft carriers and their little boys were all gone. As I departed the HU-16 I saw a Marine KC-130 taxiing out and ran into base operations to find it was headed to Iwakuni. The tower held the aircraft for me and I jumped into the follow-me van to go out to meet it. As I climbed out of the van I saw two EA-6As with ALQ-76 Pods landing! Realizing something big was up I waived off the puzzled C-130 crew and returned to base ops to find a message from the AC/S G-3 waiting since early morning advising me to call. Our first contingency mission was obviously at hand!

The EA-6As were led by Major John Watson with Capt. Terry Miner, the S-4 as senior ECMO. Capt. Skip Ringo and 1/Lt. Jack Metrock crewed the second aircraft. They told me they were alerted the night before and told to get at least two aircraft configured for active ECM missions down to Cubi Pt. and hold for follow on tasking. A KC-130 was following with another aircrew, Major Ron Cardwell, the squadron executive officer and Capt. Denny Springer, and a maintenance team. I went to the command center at Cubi Pt. to see what was going on and got a somewhat muddled briefing. All they knew was some kind of priority operation was going down in Vietnam as there were now three CVAs in the Gulf of Tonkin when normally there were only one or two and there was a message minimize in effect. After an hour or so we finally got direction from TF-77 to have the EA-6As fly into Danang and refuel for an immediate mission. Further tasking would come via the VQ-1 detachment at Danang as we had planned and a check -in frequency was provided. I relayed this to the VMCJ-1 detachment and learned there were problems with one of the aircraft, but the trailing KC-130 with the maintenance team had arrived to work on it. Typhoon Patsy was now in the South China Sea heading slowly towards Vietnam.

With communications so poor at Cubi Pt., I decided to get over to VQ-1 at Danang as soon as possible but the first available flight was around midnight. I recall the two EA-6As departing Cubi before me but I was not sure of the time. When I arrived and checked in with the VQ-1 watch officer sometime after 0330, the aircraft were there and the crews had gone to bed. The VQ-1 watch officer who had just came on duty said one of their aircraft had returned around midnight reporting what appeared to be an alpha strike against Haiphong and all kinds of air defense radars including many SAM radars were up and operating. He related a rumor that there might have been an attempt to rescue some POWs. He was not sure but thought the EA-6As had gotten on station briefly as they landed about the same time as their returning aircraft. I later learned that after aircraft and weather delays, Major Cardwell with Capt. Miner, and Capt. Ringo with 1/Lt. Metrock had flown directly to Danang landing after midnight after the Navy operation was over.



**Son Tay Raid Det (Capt. Miner, Maj. Watson, Maj. Cardwell)**



Later that night a tasking message came in for support of the protective reaction strikes under code name Freedom Bait that had been moved up to the late morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. By the briefing time there was confirmation that a rescue attempt had been made but no POWs recovered. Major Cardwell/Capt. Miner and Capt. Ringo/1/Lt. Metrock flew the morning missions as scheduled supporting Navy protective reaction strikes over NVN below the 19<sup>th</sup> parallel. There were no aircraft losses. The afternoon schedule was cancelled due to weather which had rapidly deteriorated as Typhoon Patsy came ashore south of Danang. The EA-6As were directed to leave Danang on 24 November and arrived back in Iwakuni on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Although replete with frustrations, this mini-deployment would prove to be a learning point for the squadron for future operations in support of TF-77 over the next two years.

*I only recently learned that weather was the major reason for the seemingly hectic execution of what was a well planned Navy diversionary plan for the Son Tay raid code named Operation Kingpin. With his forces in place at Tahkli AB in Thailand, the raid commander, USAF BGen Manor, made the decision on the morning of 20 November to go that night instead of the 21<sup>st</sup> as planned due to the approaching Typhoon Patsy. His raiders first learned of their objective during a noon briefing on the 20<sup>th</sup>, just under 12 hours before their departure to Son Tay and about the time VMCJ-1's EA-6As departed Iwakuni for Cubi Pt. Vice Admiral Bardshar, CTF-77, was actually read into the plan relatively late by BGen Manor after he realized he would need TF-77 to execute a major diversionary action away from the raiders objective some 25 miles SW of Hanoi. TF-77's plan would involve nearly 60 aircraft from the carriers Ranger, Oriskany and Hancock, dropping flares instead of bombs on simulated attacks on targets in the Haiphong area. Shrike anti-radiation missiles were fired and strafing runs made against reacting SAM and AAA sites. VMCJ-1's EA-6A's were to support the diversionary strikes by jamming air defense radars.*

*TF-77's diversionary attacks began a couple of hours before the raiders launched from Udorn AB around 2330 arriving at Son Tay about 0215. After about 25 minutes they were on their way out empty handed. Ironically, we learned later that the senior POW for a while at Son Tay had been Major Howard Dunn, the XO of VMFA-323 who had been shot down and captured along with his RIO, CWO John Frederick, in December 1965 while escorting a VMCJ-1 EF-10B. Then Capt. Dunn was the Officer Selection Officer who signed me up in the PLC program in 1959.*

*Moving the raid up one night also created confusion with the planned large scale attacks planned for the following day against supply storage areas and SAM sites below the 19<sup>th</sup> parallel. These strikes were the first against NVN since May and again were under the aegis of "protective reaction" retaliation against the shoot down of an RF-4C on 14 November. To the dismay of President Nixon the strikes that were meant to send the NVN a message were curtailed due to weather and accomplished little as noted by Admiral John McCain Jr., CINCPAC. Collectively, the bold attempted POW*

***rescue and the Freedom Bait strikes did give the new leaders of NVN after Ho Chi Minh's recent death a hint that President Nixon was more unpredictable than the previous administration.***

On 7-8 December two EA-6As participated in VMCI-1's first Taiwan Defense Command Eagle exercise out of Tainan AB along with two USAF EB-57s. The last days missions were canceled due to weather but the feedback I received at the post-exercise debrief and from the aircrews confirmed the value of continuing these training events. On the 11th a JAMEX against a JSDF GCI site on Kyushu was successfully completed as well as missions against the USS Halsey on 15 December and USS Hancock on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

In early December, Cdr. Hullander forwarded a message from the Commander Australian Fleet requesting U.S. ECM support for a major Australian-New Zealand Navy anti-air warfare exercise off the coast of Sydney in late February, 1971. COMSEVENTHFLT posed no objections to sending an EA-6A detachment if CG 1<sup>st</sup> MAF (Rear) chose to support the request as long as it would not interfere with TF-77 operations. They needed a timely response since the Australians had requested a representative attend the exercise planning conference on 4 January if it could be supported. With some reluctance Col. Walt Stewart, the AC/S G-3, agreed to let me present the case for VMCI support to the CG. After getting the expected enthusiastic concurrence from the VMCI-1 CO and S-3, I briefed BGen Conley with my pros outweighing the cons and ended with a note that if approved this deployment would be historic as it would send the first USMC tactical aircraft to Australia since WW II. The CG gave a conditional go ahead subject to the AC/S G-3 developing a deployment plan that would not distract from support of 1<sup>st</sup> MAF operations in Vietnam nor keep VMCI-1 from responding to a TF-77 contingency.

We were lucky to have Lt. Col. Art Butler an LDO navigator and one of the most experienced TRANSPAC planners in the Marine Corps as the Asst G-3. Col. Stewart directed him to determine the feasibility of supporting the deployment with minimal impact on the over taxed VMGR-152's KC-130s. Fortunately, Butler concluded a 10 day deployment of 3-4 EA-6As could be supported by USAF C-130s with VMGR's KC-130s only providing aerial refueling from their base in Okinawa on the first outbound leg and serving as an emergency tanker on the return leg into the Philippines from NAS Cubi Pt. The CG concurred with Lt. Col Butler's plan and 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet and the Australians were so advised. Capt. Bob Weeks, the VMCI-1 assistant maintenance officer and I would attend the planning conference in Sydney.

Detailed planning continued before Christmas with a decision made that the detachment would consist of 3 EA-6As, with a trailing C-130 carrying the maintenance team and spare aircrew. The ALQ-76 pods along with yellow gear would be transported separately by USAF C-130s to allow for use of drop tanks for the near maximum range legs. The route of flight would be from Iwakuni to Mactan AB in the southern Philippines with aerial refueling south of Okinawa. From Mactan the EA-6As could make Darwin on the

NW coast of Australia without refueling. From Darwin the route would be over to Townsville on the NE coast then south to HMAS Albatross the RAN base at Nowra, about 60 miles south of Sydney. This flight plan was filed as part of the diplomatic clearance request and approved.

On a cold New Years day 1971, Bob Weeks and I departed on a commercial flight from Hiroshima to Tokyo then via PANAM One to Sydney with a stopover in Hong Kong and a refueling stop at Bali Indonesia. Arriving about 0830 on Sunday morning, we were met by a New Zealand exchange officer with the AUSFLT training group. After getting us into our hotel, he took us down to the RAN O'club on Sydney harbor for brunch with stated intentions to leave us on our own until the next morning. He introduced us to the COMAUSFLT command duty officer, a commander dressed in short whites, who officially welcomed us on behalf of the RAN. We learned the duty officer's official post on weekends was in the O'club!! He mentioned a sailing regatta was underway that morning and about noon the club began to fill up with participants and on-lookers. I recall our Kiwi host finally leaving about 1600, and Bob and I somehow managed to extract ourselves well after dark and find our way about 2 blocks back to our hotel.

Over the next two days in Sydney we were briefed on the objectives and mechanics of the exercise which was to focus on countering air launched cruise missiles and long range anti-ship missiles as well as more conventional attack by conventional aircraft based on the old Soviet threat. The expected EA-6A role was to introduce ECM into the above simulated threat environment. We became acquainted with the exercise participants which included both RAN and New Zealand ships and aircraft and RAAF P-3Bs. All aircraft would fly from land bases as the RAN aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne was still under going repairs from a tragic collision with a U.S. destroyer the year before. I gave an EA-6A/ALQ-76 capabilities brief and completed preliminary tactics discussions with our RAN training group hosts and representatives from the participating units.

On day three, we were driven down to Nowra about 60 miles south of Sydney to HMAS Albatross, the main exercise base. Bob Weeks took the lead in the logistics and maintenance support discussions with both the air station and the host 805 Squadron which was flying A-4G Skyhawks. I met separately with Cdr. Col Patterson, the CO of 805 and his operations officer on follow-up tactics as some of our missions would be covering the A-4s acting as surrogate cruise missiles. I later learned Cdr. Patterson was the Flight Deck Officer on HMAS Melbourne at the time of the collision with the U.S. Frank Evans and was decorated for heroism for saving many sailors from both ships. I also met a USN Cdr. who was an A-4 pilot on exchange duty with 805 Squadron who was very helpful in helping us gather information to support the deployment. We returned to Sydney the following day and departed for Iwakuni with stop over in Singapore, Hong Kong and Okinawa. Our information would allow detail plans to be completed for the exercise deployment scheduled for 18 February.

By January, 1971 the support facilities and supply support for the RF-4Bs and EA-6As had significantly improved as a result of hard work by both VM CJ-1 and MAG-12. Over the next quarter, the squadron would have an average strength of 44 officers and 316 enlisted, with some critical avionics MOS still well below T/O. However, aircrew training and proficiency had significantly improved. The RF-4Bs completed all official photo missions for the month and some backlogged from prior months. The EA-6As supported an Eagle exercise in Taiwan on 11-12 January and a follow-on Jam-Ex with the USAF 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing on Okinawa. Lt. Col. Charles A. "Chuck" Houseman, a veteran VM CJ pilot, came up from Vietnam and took over as executive officer on 13 January. 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Faioli became the new Sergeant Major in January. Morale was high when the CMC, General Chapman, and his staff visited the squadron on 14 January and toured their nearly completed new hangar where he gave an enlightening brief on the future of the Marine Corps to all hands. On 18 January, two ECM sorties were flown against the USS Gridley and the following day the squadron completed 13,000 accident free hours.

The tempo of VM CJ-1 EA-6A operations and the associated message traffic was beginning to tax the AC/S G-3 staff resources especially with my many absences either planning for or supporting deployments. As a result the squadron was tasked to provide an experienced ECMO as the assistant EWO. 1/Lt. Jack Metrock was nominated and quickly assimilated into the staff. Jack had joined the squadron in Vietnam the previous year and had participated in the Son Tay raid deployment. His first assignment was to go up to Yokota AB on 25 January to attend the Eagle exercise planning conference for the following month.

February marked an historic month for the squadron, highlighted again by the EA-6As. Jack Metrock joined an EA-6A detachment led by Capt. Cliff Lockett to Tainan AB that flew 14 sorties in support of the second Eagle exercise on 8-11 February. On 17 February a three aircraft detachment departed Iwakuni for Australia. This detachment, led by Lt. Col Smith, was fully combat capable as it was subject to being diverted to Vietnam at any point. The detachment's pilots included Major John Watson, Capt. Buz Schranz and 1/Lt Jim Graham, with ECMOs Major Ed Perron, Capts. Terry Miner and Jim Vollendorth, and 1/Lt. Howell. The maintenance detachment included WO Harry Cotton, and MCARA members Sgt. J.J. Caddle and L/Cpl. Terry Consider.

At the unexpected request of the RAN exercise commander, I flew back to Sydney three days before the squadron was to arrive to join the exercise briefing team. After a kick-off session at the training group headquarters, followed by briefings for the surface combatants, we flew up to the RAAF base at Amberley outside of Brisbane in a P-3B to meet with the RAAF squadrons which included those flying French Mirage fighters. While there one of the Mirage squadrons requested to fly an ECM training mission against an EA-6A if the schedule permitted and I agreed. Returning to Sydney, I went out to the RAAF headquarters to brief their staff on the EA-6A and the ALQ-76 ECM system

which they were considering to procure. The following day I went down to Nowra to await the arrival of the EA-6As.

I learned from our 805 Squadron hosts that they had received a message from RAAF base Darwin that the Marines would be flying in the next day from a civilian airfield at Mount Isa, a mining town in the middle of the Australian outback! After arriving in Darwin, they learned that a major storm was blocking their planned next leg to Townsville on the Northeast coast. After discussions with the RAAF at Darwin, Lt. Col. Smith decided to go with their recommendation to make a refueling stop at Mount Isa, which had an airstrip used by Boeing 727s that was deemed capable of handling the EA-6As. After departing Darwin, the EA-6As would be totally dependent on dead reckoning navigation and communication relays from the C-130 maintenance aircraft as there were no UHF radio facilities or suitable navigation aids anywhere along their route across the vast Australian continent. As they arrived in the area, they were unable to contact HMAS Albatross tower and I watched as they came in NORDO on the afternoon of 20 February and taxied in to a rousing reception. Shortly thereafter all three aircraft were sporting kangaroos on their sides!



**Australia Det Arrives at Nowra Feb. 20, 1971**

From 22-25 February the detachment flew 12 sorties in support of the exercise and was able to accommodate the RAAF by flying a separate mission against the Mirages with some nice photos provided courtesy of the RAAF as proof. I got to fly a mission on the last day with Buz Shranz which called for us to make 3 chaff runs against the exercise ships. We had to abort the last run due to a low cloud layer and not wanting to bring the chaff back to base I decided to drop it all while we were at altitude some distance from shore. Upon landing I was asked to come to the base radar center where I was shown a line of blinding white still on their ATC radar scopes. I was informed they had received a complaint from Sidney approach control but told not to worry as they promised them the troublesome Yanks would be gone tomorrow!

During the exercise there were many visits by representatives from various agencies of the Australian Minister of Defence from Canberra who were escorted by the U.S. Naval attaché. Unexpectedly, the local aircraft ordnance handlers became interested in the motorized bomb loader used by Sgt. J.J. Caddle to handle the ALQ-76 pods. A couple of days later he gave a demonstration on the flight line that drew quite a crowd including some RAN procurement officials.

All was not work however as the liberty was great for all hands. Happy hour at the O'club ran long and loud. One night, the officers were invited to a nice dinner hosted by Cdr. Patterson and his wife where we met his officers and their wives. Several were Americans anxious to hear about what was going on back home just like we knew anymore than they did. As was customary we were told the exercise ended with a beer party for the troops. Lt. Col. Smith reported being asked how many pallets (not kegs) of beer he thought his troops would drink and was staggered to hear the default number put out by the host A-4 squadron and their Kiwi counterparts. Luckily, the squadron flight surgeon had come along as he was expected to be needed if the Kangaroos proved hostile.



**Lt. Col. Smith and his Australia Det Officers (HMAS Albatross, Feb. 1971)**





**EA-6A & RAAF Mirages after Breaklock Mission Feb. 1971**

As the rest of the detachment packed up to start the return home a day or so later, Lt. Col. Smith and I went to Sydney to attend the exercise debrief and then the next day caught the USAF C-130 carrying the ALQ-76 pods back to Iwakuni. Lt. Col Smith had to get back early as his change of command was on 5 March and I did the long C-130 flight with him as penitence for having flown down to Australia twice via commercial air draining the wings TAD budget! We flew in to Townsville, a small RAAF P2V base just before dark. We listened a the USAF C-130 commander, a Lt. Col., give the RAAF duty officer a hassle regards their administrative needs and queries as to the best hotel. Noticing we were Marines in flight suits, the young RAAF duty officer motioned us aside and asked if we'd like to join him and his squadron mates for dinner at their club and spend the night in their hootches. Seems he had not told the USAF crews that you couldn't get a decent meal in town and the bars closed at dark. Needless to say Lt. Col Smith and I enjoyed a great last night in Australia which made the next day flight to Guam more bearable. We arrived back in Iwakuni on 2 March with the aircraft returning on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

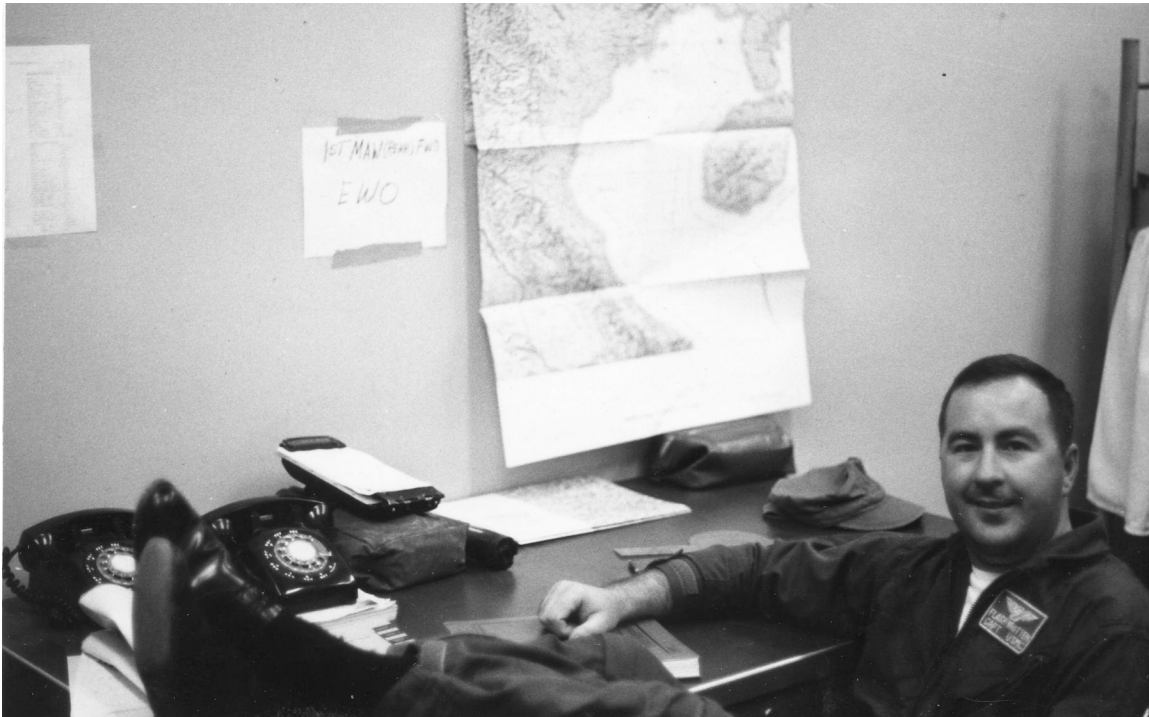
On the morning of 5 March, two RF-4Bs returned after completing " pre-strike" photo missions in support of a Korean Commando Jade exercise later in the month. That

afternoon, Lt. Col. Houseman relieved Lt. Col. Smith in a change of command ceremony attended by the CG 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Rear). Lt. Col. Houseman was a member of VMCJ-1 at Iwakuni five years before when it deployed to Vietnam. He didn't know it at the time but he would be returning again as the CO in just two days. That night I received a call from Cdr. Hullander congratulating us on the successful Australian deployment and inquiring as to the readiness status of the EA-6As. He had been alerted by TF-77 that their support was needed again as early as 8 March. We discussed the communication issues that plagued our last deployment and it was agreed that I should sit in on planning with the squadron, then fly to Cubi Pt. and take a COD aircraft out to the flag ship to work the tasking directly with the TF-77 staff. I gave the squadron a heads up for likely deployment on the 7th to Cubi Pt., and arranged a planning meeting the following morning. That afternoon, I departed for Cubi Pt. in a VMA (AW)-533 A-6A. Later that night I flew out to the USS Kitty Hawk on a C-2A COD. I was met by the TF-77 EWO who took me directly down to FlagPlot where planning for another series of "protective reaction" strikes against NVN was underway, code named Fracture Cross. RADM Damon Cooper, CTF-77, came in later and thanked me for coming and expressed his appreciation for BGen Conley and VMCJ-1's rapid response to his urgent support request. These newly authorized strikes were later known to be mainly in support of the retreat by the RVN army from a disastrous incursion into Laos intended to cut off the Ho Chi Minh trail and destroy a major NVN supply dump at Tchepone. A vicious counterattack by the NVN army exposed hundreds of their trucks and tanks to aerial attacks as they moved towards the mountain passes into Laos and South Vietnam, but TF-77 and 7<sup>th</sup> AF aircraft first had to deal with the strengthened NVN SAM and AAA defenses. I worked with the TF-77 staff to integrate the EA-6As into their strike plan to best advantage and establish a means for better communication through the VQ-1 detachment.

Around mid-day on 7 March I caught a helo from the USS Kitty Hawk to Danang and met with the VQ-1 detachment to discuss the pending operations and the support we would need. Meanwhile, Lt. Col Houseman was leading the detachment of 4 EA-6As down to Danang via Cubi Pt., with Capt. Terry Miner as senior ECMO. By the time they arrived, I had established a ready room in VQ-1 spaces for mission briefings and debriefings. Over the next 10 days Navy aircraft flying from the USS Kitty Hawk, USS Ranger and USS Hancock would carry out extensive strikes against the southern regions of NVN. On 10 March the Ranger and Kitty Hawk would fly a record setting 233 sorties over NVN and Laos. The detachment departed on the 19<sup>th</sup> and arrived back in Iwakuni on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The day after the EA-6As arrived back in Iwakuni yet another contingency call came in and Capt. Cliff Lockett and 1/Lt. Metrock led two EA-6As back into Danang on night of 21 March. The following day they supported a retaliatory strike after a USAF F-4D had been shot down by a NVN SAM while escorting an RF-4C. (3) During the month of March, the EA-6As flew 17 combat missions in support of TF-77 operations with no attack or reconnaissance aircraft losses to SAMs or radar controlled AAA. Meanwhile, back in Iwakuni, the RF-4Bs had flown 5 photo reconnaissance sorties in



support of the Commando Jade exercise in Korea and was credited with obtaining 100% of assigned target coverage.



**Author in VQ-1 Office Mar 1971 (Note 1<sup>st</sup> MAW (Rear) Forward EWO sign)**

While I was back in CONUS for a short R&R, Jack Metrock took the next contingency deployment request from TF-77 and briefed the CG on the support plan which called for a four aircraft detachment to depart Iwakuni on 4 April. This deployment, again led by Lt. Col Houseman, was to be the longest duration yet, and a full maintenance support team with two of the avionics vans was sent to Danang for the first time.. The VQ-1 detachment again provided host support and Jack was on-site as the wing liaison officer coordinating operations and overseeing post-mission reporting. He also accompanied Lt. Col. Houseman and Major Watson to Saigon for a planning and coordination meeting with 7<sup>th</sup> AF before ending his tour and returning to CONUS. While deployed for over six weeks, the detachment was tasked to support 5 missions per day and more during the peak period of 18-23 April when more strike sorties were flown over NVN since the bombing halt in 1968. (2)

Sometime in April we received a message from 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet forwarding a message from the U.S. Ambassador in Australia saying they had a claim from the Mount Isa airport authority for damages to one of their taxiways supposedly by our EA-6As. The embassy was in a huff as they were not informed that the aircraft deviated from their flight plan approved through diplomatic channels. The alleged damage must have occurred on the return trip as the locals had invited the detachment to come back through on their way out and they did. I advised the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet staff of what happened and was told not to worry they'd take care of the matter and we never heard any more.

On 14 April, 1971 Maj Gen Owens relieved BGen Conley officially re-establishing CG 1<sup>st</sup> MAW headquarters at MCAS Iwakuni. The return of the EA-6A detachment from Danang in early May marked the end of the Vietnam deployments in support of TF-77 until the initiation of Operation Freedom Train the following April. June, 1971 saw a turnover in leadership of VMCJ-1. Lt. Col Steven S. Eisenhower relieved Lt. Col. Houseman at a change of command ceremony on 15 June and Major R.T. Douglas became the executive officer. Later Major J.D. Carlton took over as S-3 and Major Lee Amick as AMO. 1sgt. Faioli was to remain as Sgt Maj until December. At the wing, Capt. K.W. Best relieved me as EWO.

On 1 July, the squadron was transferred to MAG-15, a decision largely driven by the need to shore up the material readiness of VMCJ-1's RF-4Bs which made up their largest aircraft complement. The transfer provided commonality with the group's other F-4 squadrons with improved supply and intermediate maintenance support from H&MS-15. With that change also came new emphasis on improving RF-4B aircrew proficiency which had dropped sharply with an influx of newcomers that were not Phase II qualified. Although faced with a high operational tempo over the past 6 months, the EA-6As had benefited from their higher priority supply status gained from supporting TF-77 which enhanced their operational readiness. The loss due to rotation of all of the combat experienced majors qualified in the EA-6A left a temporary leadership void.

With the situation in Vietnam somewhat stabilized the EA-6As picked back up on a busy training schedule based on the commitments established over the past year in support of 5<sup>th</sup> AF, 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet ships, Taiwan Defense Command, JSDF, and PARPRO/Beaver Hound. ECM missions were flown on 14 July against the Okinawa Air Defense Command, 25 July against the USS Bainbridge, and on 29 July against a JSDF Nike missile site. A Beaver Hound mission in the Korean area was also completed on 29 July. Three aircraft were deployed to Tainan AB from 31 July through 6 August where they flew 16 sorties in support of an Eagle exercise with three new aircrews gaining combat qualifications.

Flight operations were restricted in the month of August due to two typhoons moving through the Iwakuni area and a wing mandated safety stand-down. Twenty three RF-4B sorties were flown against a backlog of official photo requests. Planning began for a squadron deployment to NAS Cubi Pt. in late September. On 1 September, the new assistant wing commander, BGen Andy O'Donnell, visited the squadron and received a brief on the commitments and planned activities. An ECM mission was flown against the USS Midway on 3 September and squadron representatives attended the planning conference for the next Eagle exercise in Taiwan scheduled to begin on 31 October. Capt. Best and 1/Lt Harris from the squadron went to Singapore for a planning conference for an upcoming exercise involving the USS Enterprise and two British ships. On 23 September, the advanced party for the squadron deployment to NAS Cubi Pt. departed Iwakuni.

On 25 September the main body left Iwakuni for NAS Cubi Pt. to begin the first squadron deployment since VMCJ-1 came out of Vietnam. Eight RF-4Bs and 4 EA-6As would make this deployment. On 30 September two EA-6As flew ECM training missions against the USS Enterprise. On 2 October, two RF-4Bs departed for NAS Naha for six days to complete official photo missions in the Okinawa area. On 9 October, two EA-6As flew ECM sorties against the British aircraft carrier HMS Eagle which was on its last Pacific cruise before being decommissioned. On 14 October, two EA-6A sorties were flown against HMS Glamorgan, a British destroyer who would later be struck by an Argentine Exocet missile in the Falklands.

Unfortunately, severe weather from tropical storms in the Philippines significantly curtailed planned operations during the deployment. Despite the adverse weather, the primary objective to achieve Phase II combat qualification for first tour RF-4B aircrews and refresher training for others was achieved. A total of 127 sorties were flown resulting in 78 syllabus flight completions. Three pilots and two RSOs became Phase II qualified. The last aircraft departed NAS Cubi Pt. on 17 October to return home to MCAS Iwakuni. On 21 October, a detachment of 3 RF-4Bs returned to NAS Cubi Pt. and remained until 29 October completing numerous official photo missions through out the Philippines under much improved weather conditions. A total of 29 sorties were flown and 63 hours. As a result of these deployments the squadron raised its operational readiness level from C-3 to C-2.

Two EA-6As were deployed to Okinawa on 30 October for pre-exercise coordination with members of the USAF 18<sup>th</sup> TFW before flying on to Tainan AB on 31 October for the commencement of an Eagle exercise. As per normal, two EB-57s and two T-33s equipped with limited ECM equipment from the 18<sup>th</sup> TFW joined the VMCJ-1 EA-6As to make up the US aircraft exercise forces. The EA-6A ECM configuration for this exercise included three ALQ-76 pods containing 4 jammers each with the mix of frequency bands chosen to provide optimum coverage of the targeted ROC radars, and two ALE-32 chaff pods. The ROC radars involved were early warning, GCI, height finders, target acquisition radars for Nike and HAWK missiles and fire control radars for AAA. Additionally, the ROC fighter AI radars and shipborne radars from ROC Navy often engaged. This exercise, like most began with a detailed briefing by the ROC exercise lead with all units represented. During the course of the exercise the spare EA-6A crews visited various ROC radar sites to observe first hand the results of the ECM. The EA-6As departed for Iwakuni after completing 14 of the scheduled 18 sorties with the others lost to weather or canceled by the ROC. The detailed exercise debrief on 6 November was hosted by Lt. Gen. Chan, the Head of the Bureau of Communications for the Ministry of National Defense. While the exercise was deemed a success and improved jamming was noted by several sites over previous exercises, several coordination issues were addressed to enhance the next exercise scheduled for 11 December

After a reduced flight schedule for the month of November as the squadron prepared for and successfully completed a MAG-15 A& M Inspection the operational tempo increased during the month of December for both aircraft types. Three RF-4Bs were deployed to Naha on 3 December and another detachment returned to NAS Cubi Pt. on 15 December to complete official photo missions. A total of 29 sorties were flown on these deployments. The EA-6As completed Beaver Hound missions on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of December and flew a JAMEX against CTG-36 on the 4<sup>th</sup>. On 11 December, 3 EA-6As flew to Naha for pre-exercise coordination with the 18<sup>th</sup> TFW. One of the EA-6As was down with mechanical problems requiring the KC-130 with the trailing maintenance crew to divert to Naha. All three aircraft departed to Tainan AB on the 13<sup>th</sup> and immediately got into the exercise. Over the next 5 days they flew 17 sorties, 3 more than planned as they picked up some flights lost by one of the EB-57's maintenance problems. The exercise was a solid success from both sides although the detachment noted the paucity of high band ALQ-76 jammers restricted ECM events against the ROC fighters and some shipborne radars.

As the year ended the situation in Vietnam was again heating up even as U.S. ground forces had been reduced to 159,000 vs 280,000 at the beginning of the year. NVN forces taking advantage of the monsoon weather clearly were positioning themselves for a major offensive that at first was feared to come in January during the Tet holidays but did not.<sup>2</sup> The buildup of SAM and AAA defenses just North of the DMZ coupled with bold MIG attacks against U.S. aircraft in Northern Laos were of major concern to both 7<sup>th</sup> AF and TF-77. <sup>1</sup> An increase in protective reaction strikes was ordered although for unknown reasons VM CJ was not requested to provide EA-6A support. Lt. Gen Lavelle, the 7<sup>th</sup> AF commander would shortly be relieved of command accused of secretly directing his aircrews to conduct strikes over NVN based on the assumption that every mission was fired on by the NVN air defenses.<sup>1</sup> On 25 January, 1972 President Nixon divulged that Secretary of State Kissinger had been engaged in secret negotiations with his NVN counterparts over the past 2 years. He presented NVN with an 8 point peace plan that called for release of all POWs with a commitment to withdraw U.S. Forces if free elections were held in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> It was promptly rejected by NVN, and the march towards a major military conformation later in the Spring looked inevitable.

Meanwhile back at Iwakuni, the EA-6A section of VM CJ-1 continued to maintain a high state of readiness even as their RF-4B counterparts again fell into a period of declining proficiency due to new positive control regulations and lack of deployment opportunities. In January ECM two ECM sorties were flown against the USS Oklahoma City and the British HMS Swan, and two Beaver Hound PARPRO missions were conducted. On 24 January a 3 plane EA-6A detachment again deployed to Tainan AB to support an Eagle exercise that was monitored and analyzed by the USAF Communications Security Agency much like they did for ECM operations over NVN. The special U.S. eyes only feedback provided was like an Operational Readiness Inspection for the squadron's

EA-6As. Although scheduled without consideration to events down in Vietnam, it was very timely to say the least.

After flying 14 sorties in support of exercise Eagle, the EA-6As returned to Iwakuni in early February to regroup. Later in the month another Beaver Hound mission was flown and a series of Breaklock air-to-air missions were flown in support of VMFA-115. Four official photo missions were completed by the RF-4Bs. On 1 March, three EA-6As were deployed to NAS Cubi Pt. in support of exercise Freedom Block. An ECM mission was completed against the USS Worden on 14 March and a Beaver Hound mission was flown on 21 March. On 24 March Major John D. Carlton relieved Lt. Col Eisenhower at a ceremony attended by Maj. Gen Owens, CG 1<sup>st</sup> MAW. Major Carlton had been the S-3 for 6 months. He led a 3 plane detachment to Tainan AB on 27 March for exercise Eagle and later attended the debrief in Taipei on the 31<sup>st</sup>. It would be the last Eagle exercise for VMCF-1 for nearly a year.

On 1 April, the NVN Easter Offensive began in earnest as the NVN 304<sup>th</sup> Division supported by artillery, AAA and SA-2 units equaling another division sweep across the DMZ following a three day bombardment of rockets and artillery fire. Eventually up to 150,000 NVN troops with an estimated 500 tanks would be committed to a three-prong attack aimed at bringing down the South Vietnamese government and discrediting President Nixon who had just announced an indefinite suspension of the Paris peace talks.<sup>2</sup> With this offensive the NVN army had succeeded in establishing their SAM umbrella over the entire DMZ. On 2 April an EB-66C, call sign Bat 21, supporting a B-52 strike below the DMZ was downed by a SA-2. Only one of the six crewmembers survived, Lt. Col. Hambleton, who would become famous for evading capture for 10 days before being rescued by Navy Seals. On 3 April a USAF OV-10 was shot down by a SAM while coordinating the search for Bat 21 near the DMZ.<sup>3</sup>

After declaring “the bastards have never been bombed like they’re going to be bombed this time”.<sup>4</sup> President Nixon ordered an immediate series of air attacks on NVN South of the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel under code name Freedom Train. With that order a major redeployment of all three service’s aviation units began. The USS Kitty Hawk was ordered back to the Gulf of Tonkin joining 3 other TF-77 aircraft carriers and USAF B-52 wings alerted for possible missions over NVN. On 3 April, the CG 1<sup>st</sup> MAW ordered VMCF-1 to deploy its EA-6As to NAS Cubi Pt. to support TF-77 operations and the first 3 aircraft with support personnel arrived there on 4 April. On 6 April, two more U.S. aircraft were shot down by NVN SAMs and the next day VMCF-1’s EA-6As flew their first combat missions in support of Operation Freedom Train.<sup>1</sup> On 7 May, Hanoi would come under attack and the Haiphong port mined when a full scale bombing campaign began under Operation Linebacker I.<sup>2</sup>

The initiation of Operation Linebacker I meant a long term deployment to NAS Cubi Pt. marking an end to two years of VMCF-1 being **on the road** around the Pacific.

## NOTES

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