

INTRODUCTION

With the increase in the number of PBR's assigned to the U.S. Navy in Vietnam in late 1968, it was obvious that additional air assets would be required. Since additional helicopters, the most effective weapon system for the mission assigned, were not readily available on loan from the U.S. Army and Navy helicopters would not be available for at least a year, the next alternative was to obtain an air asset that was in the inventory ready for issue. CNO (admiral Moorer) at this time made arrangements to provide 20 OV-10A's on loan from the Marine Corps to provide the immediate requirement for the in-country forces.

The 20 aircraft would be used as follows: 14 in-country and 6 in CONUS for training. The 14 in-country to be utilized in two five-plane detacments-one at Vung Tau and one at Binh Thuy AFB, with the remaining aircraft at the U.S. Navy Helo Base at Binh Thuy for maintenance and spares.

In November 1968, CAPT Price (CTF 116-Operational commander of the in-country River Patrol Forces) obtained special permission from the Seventh Air Force (the in-country control agency for all fixed wing aircraft) to operate the OV-10A Navy aircraft under the same rules of engagement as the in-country Navy helicopter. Thus, the in-country Navy OV-10A's were restricted from carrying any bomb-type ordnance-only gun-type ammunition and forward firing rockets were allowed. Only under the helo rules of engagement could the Bronco be of immediate response to the River Patrol Force boat and Seal assets.

History and Highlights of Navy

Light Attack Squadron Four

NAS North Island - January 4, 1969

Light Attack Squadron Four (VAL-4) came into official existence on Friday, January 3, 1969. The commissioning ceremony and subsequent reception at the officers' club were well organized and smoothly conducted, much to the satisfaction of squadron personnel as well as the local and visiting contractor representatives.

RADM Karaberis, who replaced VADM Shinn as the key speaker, commented on the attributes of the OV-10A and the reasons for its selection for the first Navy COIN squadron. These comments were made in context with the Navy's increasing counterinsurgency commitments and support of Riverine Team operations was mentioned as one of a number of potential applications of the OV-10A in the COIN role.

There has been quite a bit of planning and proposal activity within and among various Navy commands during the past few weeks concerning assignment of additional aircraft to VAL-4 and possibly to VS-41 for training. Information on the squadron level indicates that no decisions have been resolved other than that a number of OV-10A aircraft will be assigned to ComNavAirPac for reassignment as dictated by the requirements of both the Marine Corps and Navy.

Bureau numbers of current VAL-4 aircraft are:

155460	155471
155461	155472
155462	155473
155463	155474
155470	155475

Because of the New Years Holiday and squadron commissioning this week, only three days of flight operations were conducted. A sharp increase in operation training requirements next week (to continue during the remainder of the training period) is expected and it is anticipated that Maintenance will be hard pressed to provide sufficient ready aircraft to meet the scheduled flights.

The problems involve the limited number of aircraft (delivery of the planned additional two aircraft will improve the situation considerably), limited number of maintenance personnel (some will not have completed the various required schools until just prior to deployment), and the lack of spare parts in local inventory as well as shortages of a number of items in the Supply System. The squadron is expected to deploy with a complete outfitting of spares and GSE. It is significant that the squadron is attempting to acquire a spares provisioning inventory for deployment and concurrently attempting to support an intensive training operation.

Reported January 11, 1969

In addition to familiarization, formation, navigation, and instrument training flights, rocket and bombing flights were scheduled last week to supplement the two weeks weapons training at Yuma scheduled next month. The aircraft are loaded with six live 2.75 rockets and six MK76 practice bombs at NAS North Island for delivery on the Yuma ranges.

Thirty ordnance flights were flown this past week with only two malfunctions; both were caused by errors in loading. The aircraft armament systems have performed flawlessly, much to the credit of ordnance crews who thoroughly checked the systems during the last three weeks.

Approximately 900 hours have been accumulated since the squadron commenced operations near the end of October. During this time less than ten flights were cancelled for lack of ready aircraft and only one flight (last week) was aborted because of an aircraft system malfunction.

BuNo 155490 is expected to be delivered over the weekend. This and the other additional aircraft scheduled for delivery this month will contribute substantially to maintaining the scheduled flight training requirements (BuNo 155491).

NAS North Island, January 18, 1969

Maintenance requirements are increasing as the aircraft are being flown more frequently and total flight time on the aircraft increases. The squadron also received BuNo. 155491. Lower aircraft availability does not necessarily indicate that the maintenance man/hour requirements are increasing, the squadron is well below complement for available maintenance personnel (some are attending various schools) and the aircraft time awaiting maintenance is quite often much greater than the actual time required to correct a malfunction.

Total hours flown during the first 16 days of this month is 246.2. Approximately 70 hours (50 flights) have been bombing and rocket runs on the Yuma ranges. These flights will reduce the heavy operational requirements during the deployment to Yuma next month.

All squadron activities have increased substantially during the last two weeks. Spares, SSE, and GSE have suddenly began arriving on the scene, at an ever-increasing rate creating a new problem of getting the equipment inventoried and packed prior to deployment.

Reported January 25, 1969

Unusually poor weather conditions restricted flight operations about 25 percent of the time this week; icing conditions as low as 7000 feet prevented several flights from crossing the mountains to the Yuma ranges for bombing and

rocket training. Several pilots have encountered severe icing recently and their experiences have been quite similar to those reported by OV-10A activities in the eastern part of the country. Despite the weather limitations, total flight training time is somewhat in excess of 1200 hours - still ahead of scheduled training requirements.

Two additional aircraft (BuNo 155494 and 155495) were delivered late this week for a total of 14. Four more are expected. It has not yet been decided how many aircraft will be deployed with the squadron and how many will be retained by VS-41, if any. Any problem of meeting scheduled flight training requirements prior to deployment have been eliminated by the assignment of additional aircraft to the squadron.

Reported February 1, 1969

Maintenance activity has increased considerably the latter part of the week in preparation for deployment to MCAS Yuma on Sunday, 2 February, with 14 aircraft.

Two new aircraft (BuNo 155493 and 155496) were delivered this week. One aircraft turned off the runway onto a taxi way that wasn't there and struck a runway light with the RH prop, following a night landing. A serviceable prop was obtained from BuNo 155460 and the damaged prop was sent to Hamilton Standard at Los Angeles for repair.

More than 550 hours were flown during the month of January. Total flight hours this training phase now exceeds 1400 hours (3 months) and about 400 more hours should be accumulated during the first three weeks of February.

MCAS Yuma - February 8, 1969

Fourteen aircraft were deployed to MCAS Yuma on Sunday February 2 for a two week period of weapons training. Two aircraft were left at NAS North



NAVY NEWS RELEASE

RIVER PATROL FORCE

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THREE YEARS WITH THE RIVER PATROL FORCE

There is no cake, no presents are being passed around, and there is no assemblage for the occasion; but today, April 10, 1969, marks the third anniversary that U.S. Navy river patrol boats (PBRs) have been actively patrolling rivers and canals in South Vietnam. In silent remembrance, the men operating the 37-foot boats of the brown water Navy today are recalling the rapid growth that has marked the progress of this unique organization.

BEGINNING

The first PBR patrols in South Vietnam commenced April 10, 1966, following the establishment of River Squadron Five, the administrative command for the

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boats. The operational command, the River Patrol Force (CTF 116), had previously been established and was headed by Rear Admiral N. G. Ward who also served as Commander Naval Forces Vietnam. The mission of the boats, called Operation Game Warden, was to patrol the rivers, estuaries and canals of South Vietnam to interdict the movement of Communist supplies and personnel and to keep innocent traffic on these waterways safe.

INFANT PROBLEMS

The initial eleven river patrol boats - hasty adaptations of fiberglass pleasure craft - encountered many difficulties when they arrived in South Vietnam, March 21, 1966. By no means did the Mark I PBR look optimistic when the boats began patrolling the Long Tau River. The patrols consisted of two PBRs and lasted twelve hours.

Shortly thereafter the Force encountered difficulty with the corrosive metals in the water jet pumps that were to propel the crafts at 25 knots. Stationed on the dock landing ship USS Belle Grove (LSD-2), the men found new types of fenders were required if they were to preserve the fiberglass bodies when tying up alongside the ship.

These discrepancies were soon corrected and the patrols became increasingly more efficient. Adaptations by the four men crews included stripping most of the armor from the forward twin .50-caliber machine gun mount to increase visibility for the boat coxswain; replacing the single .30-caliber machine gun aft with a .50-caliber machine gun to reduce the necessity of varied ammunition and adding the M-18 grenade launcher, a newly adopted

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automatic weapon. The more serious problems were brought to the attention of the manufacturers and a Navy engineering team.

A NEW MODEL

From their wobbly introduction, the river patrol boats were modified to become feared gunships. In September 1967, the Force obtained a new, completely modified PBR - the Mark II. The new craft had larger and improved water jet pumps with less corrosive metals, a new system of electrical firing for the forward twin .50-caliber machine guns, more protective armor, and the craft could obtain a much higher speed than its precursor. This craft was specifically designed for the Vietnam riverine war.

Shortly after the introduction of the Mark II PBR, Mark II ALFA patrol boats arrived in South Vietnam with an improved electrical firing system for the twin .50-caliber machine guns, and styro-foam flotation gear to keep the boats afloat even though bullet riddled.

The older Mark I PBRs were modified with Mark II equipment and still patrol the rivers and canals of South Vietnam while all Mark II PBRs now contain flotation gear.

ASSETS

Today there are 250 river patrol boats in South Vietnam. There are 130 Mark II and Mark II ALFA and 120 Mark I PBRs situated throughout the Mekong Delta, Rung Sat Special Zone and the I Corps Tactical Zone on land bases, mobile support bases, and modified tank landing ships (LSTs), with more than

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1600 navymen attached to River Patrol Flotilla Five, the administrative command for the PBRs. River Patrol Flotilla Five, a unit of U.S. Pacific Fleet Amphibious Force was established on September 1, 1968, following the disestablishment of River Squadron Five.

OPERATING AREAS

The Mekong Delta is the rice bowl of Vietnam. More than half the population is located here. The area consists of more than 5,000 miles of navigable waters and produces fully one half of the country's food. For these reasons, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces have used the waterways for transporting men and supplies. They obtain food and recruits from the Delta and extort money from the villagers.

The River Patrol Force has recognized the importance of this area and keeps most of its patrol boats in the Delta region.

The Rung Sat Special Zone is 406 square miles of dense mangrove swamps interspersed with heavy nipa palm. The northern border is only 15 miles south of Saigon and its southern border extends to the South China Sea. The Long Tau River, the main shipping channel to Saigon, flows through this area giving it much strategic importance.

The Rung Sat Special Zone, or "Forest of Assassins" as it is frequently called, has been used as a refuge area by pirates and assassins hiding from the authorities.

The Vietnamese Navy has been tasked by the Central Government with control

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of all operations in the Rung Sat. The Vietnamese commander is advised by the U.S. Navy. Patrolling this area are River Divisions operating from Nha Be.

Following the sinking of the American freighter Eastern Mariner by Communist mines on the Long Tau River in May 1966, minesweeping craft were also added to the Force and operate from Nha Be.

There are two River Divisions in the I Corps Tactical Zone; one division stationed near Hue, the old capital of South Vietnam, on the Perfume River; and the other, three miles south of the Demilitarized Zone at Cua Viet patrolling the Cua Viet River.

VERSATILITY

On February 1, 1967, the River Patrol Force became a separate operational command. Prior to then, the Force had been commanded by Rear Admiral Ward who was also Commander Naval Forces Vietnam. Today the Force encompasses UH-1B "Seawolf" helicopter gunships for close air support, minesweeping craft (MSBs and MSMs), and paramilitary teams of SEALS (Sea-Air-Land intelligence and reconnaissance specialists) trained in clandestine operations ashore.

FLEXIBILITY

As the riverine war continued, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers continued to find transporting supplies and personnel on the rivers a near impossible task and they sought other avenues for transporting their materials and personnel. They began using the canals adjacent to the main rivers for movement of war supplies and men in small motorized sampans and junks. In

November 1968, the River Patrol Force began joint operations with the two other Navy Task Forces in Vietnam. Heretofore, the three Forces did not operate together regularly, but under the new concept, called Operation Sea Lords (Lake-Ocean-River-Delta strategy) they began joint pursuit of the elusive enemy. The monitors, assault support patrol boats (ASPBs), command and control boats (CCBs), and armed troop carriers (ATCs) of the Mobile Riverine Force (CTF 117), the swift boats of the Coastal Surveillance Force (CTF 115), and the various craft and helicopter gunships of the River Patrol Force (CTF 116) have made quite a formidable armada pitted against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regular forces.

Offsprings of Operation Sea Lords are Operation Giant Slingshot, Operation Barrier Reef and Operation Tran Hung Dao. These operations, stretching all the way across the Mekong Delta, from Ha Tien on the Gulf of Thailand to Tay Ninh 48 miles northwest of Saigon, are designed to interdict communist infiltration of men and arms into the Mekong Delta and Capital Military District. To date, these campaigns have proven very successful impeding the flow of communist material and men.

GOODWILL AMBASSADORS

Besides the ammunition used against enemy forces, words and deeds are also helping defeat the Communists. Using PBRs to transport doctors and nurses, the navymen provide medical attention to Vietnamese villagers, and use their speedy craft as ambulances for wounded personnel. Many times the boats have raced the stork to the hospital and on several occasions they have lost. In gratitude for

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delivering her healthy son, one Vietnamese mother named her son Ngayan "PBR" Dinh.

The PBR crewmembers use tape recorders and loudspeakers to announce alterations in curfew hours, promulgate instructions to Viet Cong desiring to surrender (Chieu Hoi) and to persuade others to defect. They distribute psyops leaflets and essentials such as soap, fish hooks, needles, thread and the like to the people they check on the waterways in an effort to encourage the villagers to be faithful to the National Government and to advise the Free World Forces of enemy activities and intentions. The PBRs also frequently carry Vietnamese policemen for liaison and interpreting.

This psychological warfare has been highly successful. There have been several hundred Hoi Chanhs (Viet Cong defectors) in the past three years through the direct efforts of the River Patrol Force.

THE LEADERS

Since the establishment of the River Patrol Force, there have been four commanders: Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward, USN; Captain Burton B. Witham, Jr., USN; Captain Paul N. Gray, USN; and Captain Arthur W. Price, Jr., USN, the present commander who also serves as commander of River Patrol Flotilla Five. Capt. Price also directs Operations Giant Slingshot, Barrier Reef and Tran Hung Deo which employ naval craft assigned to the Navy's Coastal Surveillance Force and Mobile Riverine Force in addition to his own PBRs.

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ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the commencement of Game Warden operations on the rivers and canals of South Vietnam, the men of the Force have killed over 3,000 of the enemy and have sunk, damaged or captured over 6,500 of his boats. Although these statistics are considered significant, of great significance are reports from local officials stating that because of Game Warden's presence in the Mekong Delta, the villagers are able to move their produce to and from the market places without fear of communist harassment or extortion.

The men of the River Patrol Force have not been neglected for their honorable and heroic achievements. The units of the Force have been awarded two Presidential Unit Citations, one Meritorious Unit Citation, and one Navy Unit Commendation. Two of its men have won the nation's highest award - the Congressional Medal of Honor. Six Navy Crosses, nine Legion of Merit awards, 69 Silver Stars, 681 Bronze Stars, and numerous other awards, totaling over 6,000, have also been awarded to the men of the Force.

As river patrol boats complete their third year patrolling the vital waterways of South Vietnam, the men of the "Brown Water Navy" anxiously look forward to the victorious and precipitant completion of this war - a war in which they have written new chapters in Naval history.

Reported April 4, 1969

The fourteen squadron aircraft are scheduled to arrive at Vung Tau tonight, Friday 4 April. The squadron operational ready date is a matter of question. Operations personnel and CTF-116 staff would like five aircraft at VNAF Binh Thuy on Monday, 7 April. This is not enough time to depreserve the aircraft, conduct a thorough inspection, systems checkout, and flight test prior to releasing the aircraft to operational status.

Since the aircraft will be dispersed to three different operating sites, this will be the only opportunity to perform a concentrated maintenance program and bring all aircraft up to latest configuration. The situation will probably end in a compromise, and VAL-4 should certainly have at least several aircraft operationally ready the latter part of next week.

There appears to be strong pressure from Task Force 116 (Game Warden), Com NavForV, and higher Navy organizational levels to expedite VAL-4 participation in Game Warden operations. The reasons may be obscure at some levels, but the need is quite apparent on the task force level; the surface units require greater fire power support than the helos can provide, and the need for air support is increasing.

A detachment of HAL-3 Huey 1B helicopters (Sea Wolves) and a PBR division (river patrol boats) are located at this base along with VAL-4. It is a small base, with a small O-club, and each operational unit is well aware of the likes and dislikes of the others. The Game Warden staff and Operational Control Center is also located here at NSA Binh Thuy. It is a tough, coordinated, hard-hitting force, and provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the fast response and strike capability of the Bronco aircraft.

Reported April 12, 1975

The VAL-4 Bronco aircraft arrived at Vung Tau on Easter Sunday, 6 April 1969, aboard the transport "Seatrain." Four aircraft, BUNOs 155460, 155462, 155470 and 155473 remained at NAS North Island assigned to VS-41. The ship anchored about three miles out in the bay and crews began bringing aircraft in by barge in midafternoon and continued until all aircraft were off-loaded by Monday morning.

The aircraft were then towed to the VAL-4 Detachment Bravo area where squadron personnel immediately began stripping preservative from the aircraft maintenance crews worked around the clock preparing five aircraft for ferry to VNAF Binh Thuy. Commander Task Force 116 (River Patrol Flotilla Five) and its operational control center are located at Binh Thuy and the squadron was directed to commence operations as soon as possible in the area. Consequently, the first five aircraft that were depreserved received a quick visual inspection and engine ground run prior to departure from Vung Tau. The remaining aircraft (9) received a more thorough inspection, engine ground run, and test flight prior to being placed in operational status.

The first five aircraft which were assigned to Detachment Alfa at VNAF Binh Thuy were ready Tuesday afternoon (less than 48 hours after being off-loaded) and the remaining aircraft were all completed (including test flight) and in operational status by noon Friday. Elapsed time to ready the 14 aircraft was $5\frac{1}{2}$ days. Other than hand tools, the only support equipment available was an NC-1 auxiliary power unit, an air compressor and solvent spraying apparatus, and a tow bar. There was no tow tractor available after the aircraft were towed from the dock; they were pushed in and out of the hangar and reventments.

The aircraft survived the transition well and were in good condition when the preservation was removed.

NAVAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY (NSA) BINH THUY

BUNO 155463
155471

VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE BASE (VNAF) BINH THUY

BUNO 155472
155474
155490
155493
155495
155497

VUNG TAU ARMY AIR BASE

BUNO 155461
155475
155491
155494
155496
155503

Operational flights commenced on Wednesday, 8 April at VNAF Binh Thuy and on Thursday at Vung Tau. Five aircraft are assigned to each detachment and the remaining four will be pool and maintenance aircraft rotated in and out of NSA Binh Thuy, where VAL-4 headquarters, CTF-116 staff and Operational Control Center are located.

The flight crews flew two area familiarization flights and one strike against a "free fire zone" target prior to assumption of operational commitments. Ordnance load on these flights consisted of 2000 rounds of 7.62 cal. ammunition and 38 2.75 rockets (two LAU pods). Ordnance will be limited to this configuration until Zuni rocket fuses and 20MM ammunition is available. Ordnance supplies have been expected tomorrow for the last several weeks. Any equipment or material that the squadron did not bring with it is very difficult to obtain.

Working and operating facilities at Vung Tau and NSA Binh Thuy are very good. Hangars, reventments, apron, office and shop spaces were all constructed by the Seabees for VAL-4.

Flight Operations next week will continue scheduled familiarization flights and ordnance delivery on requested targets. The following week the squadron will assume operational commitments established by CTF-116. Each detachment will be expected to maintain two ready alert and two standby alert aircraft. More than likely the ready alert aircraft will be airborne most of the time.

Reported April 19, 1975

Flight activities this week involved armed day patrol, a few night patrols, and a few test flights and ferry flights. Armament has been limited to 2.75 rockets, M60 guns and flares. However, 20mm ammunition and Zuni fuses were received at the end of the week and the aircraft will be configured with a heavier strike capability.

The Vung Tau detachment has employed the SUU-11 Minigun pod on some flights. The two detachments are operationally autonomous with headquarters, administration, and maintenance located at the Binh Thuy Naval Support Activity (NSA); each is operationally responsible to a different Task Group (CTG) under Task Force 116 (CTF-116). The CTF-116 staff and Operational Control Center (OPCON) is also located at NSA Binh Thuy.

The pre-deployment concept of VAL-4 as a mobile, self-supporting squadron with its own logistics package and intermediate maintenance capability has ceased to exist. ComFairWestPac had different ideas of integrating the squadron in a Fleet Air Detachment at Binh Thuy along with HAL-3 (the helicopter Seawolf squadron) and the existing Fleet Air Service Unit (FASU).

The FASU was a very small unit with only a few personnel and very little equipment. All VAL-4 support equipment, shop equipment, spares and other stock were turned over to FASU along with the TDY personnel required to support VAL-4 which was capable of its own support prior to transfer of its assets. Operational control of the squadron was also absorbed to some degree by the CTF-116 organization.

Operational commitments have not yet been very demanding and both detachments have had more than enough ready aircraft for flight operations. There are usually two aircraft in calender inspection status but the inspection requirements will stretch out in the near future when the high time aircraft are completed.

A Navy Bronco was reported to have gone down early in the evening of 16 April but later turned out to be an Air Force Bronco which reportedly collided with a helicopter 25 miles south of Saigon.

Reported April 26, 1969

Flight operations continued to be limited to armed patrols at both detachments as during the previous week, except that a number of the DET ALPHA (VNAF Binh Thuy) flights have been armed with Zuni 5-inch rockets and the Mark IV 20mm cannon pod. This combination has provided a tremendous increase in the capability of the Bronco to destroy sampans, hootches, and bunkers - the most common targets. The Vung Tau DET BRAVO aircraft have been configured with the SUU-11 minigun pod with good results.

FM communications equipment has been installed at each detachment and the squadron will assume full operational commitments on 27 April, maintaining ready alert aircraft at each location as well as the armed patrols. The alert aircraft are scrambled by the operational control centers whenever air, ground, or river patrol units request assistance. The FM radio

is vital to mission readiness. Almost all air-to-air and air-to-ground communication is conducted by FM. The UHF is seldom used except for communication with the tower and radar control, and the HF SSB is practically useless since the only channel available is quite heavy with traffic. A second FM set with a homer (similar to the USAF configuration) would enhance the OV-10A mission capability, especially at night when a situation such as attempting to locate a river patrol boat in distress.

a considerable increase in strike capability. RMAIRSYCOM approval for
Reported May 3, 1969

Flight operations were rather slow the first few days this week but the activity has increased the last two days. Beginning last Sunday, two ready alert aircraft have been maintained at each detachment around the clock in addition to day and night armed patrols.

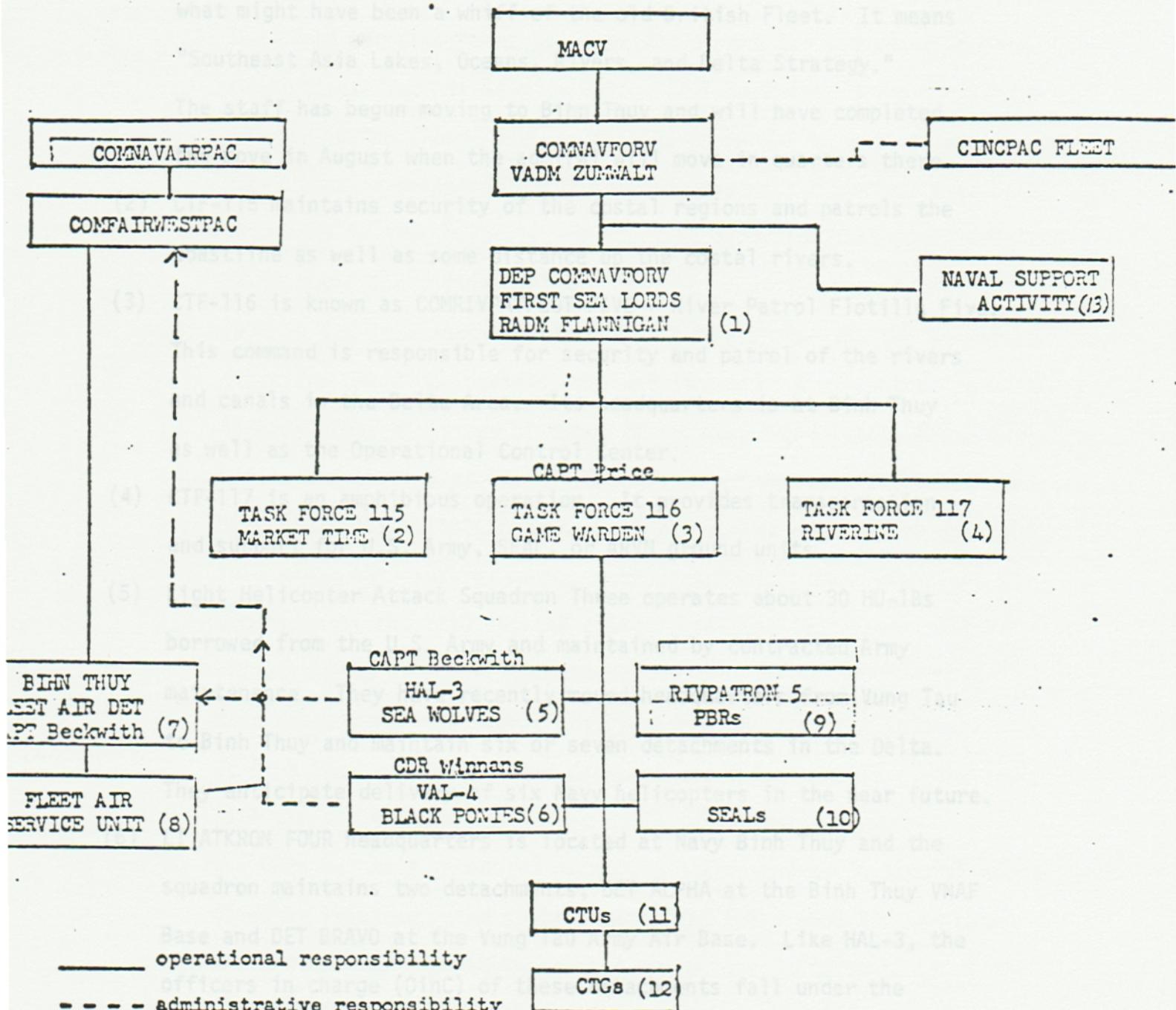
The Vung Tau detachment seemed to be doing well in target assignments and scrambles, but the Binh Thuy armed patrols were often returning with ordnance or delivering on a "free fire zone" before returning. Pilots were becoming quite bored after standing 12-hour alerts for five days without being scrambled. The matter was aired at the daily CTF-116 operations briefing on Friday morning and the alert was scrambled three times Friday night and early Saturday morning.

One scramble was to assist in extracting a SEAL team that was entrapped just a few miles away. In addition to the scrambles and patrols, VAL-4 has occasionally been requested to support CTF-117 Riverine Command amphibious operations. This type of activity is expected to increase since CTF-117 specifically requested Broncos for an ARVN Marine operation this Saturday.

The last two operations have taken place over 100 miles away, south of the delta region and south of Quan Long in the Ca Mau Peninsula. The flights are relieved on a four-hour cycle and installation of the centerline fuel tank is required.

To reconfigure rapidly and support a variety of mission speaks well of the Bronco's flexibility, but when denied use of the centerline station for ordnance, the amount and variety of ordnance that can be loaded is limited. In this situation, two LAU-33 Zuni pods on the wing stations would provide

U.S. NAVY COMMAND STRUCTURE
IV CORPS AREA
VIETNAM



The most demanding situations are those where the alert aircraft have been scrambled and the armed patrol becomes engaged in support of surface units that are under fire in another area, then must depart because of fuel or ordnance limitations. Ideally, a flight would be launched to relieve the returning patrol on station, and the returning aircraft would be rearmed and refueled to assume the ready alert. Then this flight is launched when another two aircraft return. Thus one detachment of six aircraft can provide a ready alert capability and almost constant air cover for another squadron operation for an indefinite period, or until one aircraft goes down for maintenance.

Because of the nature of enemy operations in the Delta, a single strike is usually sufficient to permit a trapped PBR or SEAL team to retire with dignity. They are impressed by the Zuni rockets and have noted that the probability of attack or ambush is much less likely when the patrols are overhead.

At long last a message from COMNAVAIRPAC has authorized installation of the LAU-33 Zuni rocket pod on the OV-10A wing missile stations. Six aircraft have been configured with launchers since last Wednesday and they have been fired on five flights so far without a hitch.

For sighting, the gunsight pipper is placed just to the left or right of the target, about 10 to 15 mils. Works fine. The launcher can be set before flight to fire single or ripple; only one station can be fired at one time. When a single round is fired from one wing station a barely-detectable yaw is induced, and when both rounds are fired there is only a slight yaw involved. The drag effect appears to be about the same as that for the 4-round LAU-10 launcher, and a little degradation of lateral control response is apparent in the lower airspeed range up to about 100 knots.

both detachments maintain 24-hour alerts, the armed patrols (where most of the time is accumulated) are scheduled by the separate control centers.

Since the DET ALPHA squadron personnel live, eat, sleep, drink and complain on the same small base with the CTF-116 Game Warden operations personnel, their cajoling for more patrols is apt to produce more response. Also, the pilots on patrol are more frequently soliciting the Army and USAF FACs for targets and, with "Red Rose" clearance (CTF-116 OPCON), sometimes support U. S. Army and ARVN troops with air strikes.

The FACs and ground units are much impressed with the striking power and accuracy of the Bronco (their normal support is provided by Huey gunships, Cobras, and F-100s) and are more frequently contacting "Red Rose" for "Black Pony" (VAL-4) support. However, the rules of engagement are such that the VAL-4 Broncos and HAL-3 Huey's are primarily employed in support of the Navy boats, ships, and SEAL teams.

Support for other friendly troops actually engaged with the enemy is granted only if the various Navy units around the Delta are not likely to be in trouble at the moment. Clearance is always granted when friendlies are entrapped. These ground rules are not really too confining for this peculiar type of warfare, and under the circumstances involved in roles and missions limitations, permit rather effective employment of the squadron and its aircraft. Yet operational demands have not taxed the full capability of the squadron.

Post strike damage assessment reports following some recent "Black Pony" strikes compare to that of any attack aircraft in terms of structures, bunkers, and personnel destroyed. The squadron recently received some proximity fuzes for the Zuni rocket which further improves the capability of this weapon to destroy surface targets. This fuze will detonate

the warhead 35 to 50 feet over the target and initial reports from the pilots indicate that it will level a hooch-type structure (its original purpose was anti-personnel).

Other fuzes used on the Zuni are nose impact fuze on the MK32 warhead and base fuze on the MK24 warhead. The latter will penetrate about four feet before detonating. A combination of fuzing provides a great degree of flexibility.

When approval for installation of the LAU-33A Zuni launcher on the wing stations was received about two weeks ago, it was anticipated that the additional four Zuni rockets would enhance the ordnance versatility with a mix of 2.75 rockets and Zunis. However, experimentation with various configurations indicates that a capacity load of Zunis with mixed fuzes may be more effective since 20 of these weapons can now be carried on one aircraft. These 5-inch rockets are normally fired singly and provide the two-plane flight with a capability of keeping a target under constant attack for an hour or more, depending on fuel limitations.

The fragmentation pattern of the Zuni is so great that 2.75 rockets are preferred when working close-in with friendly troops even though the inherent accuracy of the Zuni is much superior. It's anticipated that the consistency and depth of operational experience in another month or so will permit the compilation of a qualitative summary concerning weapons compatibility, effectiveness, tactical employment, etc.

Since commencement of VAL-4 operations with the Game Warden Task Force (CTF-116) there have been occasional subtle indicators of intentional publicity restraint at some level of the Navy Command concerning the existence and activities of the squadron. Several articles have appeared

in local in-country publications that have commended the PBRs, SEALs, and HAL-3; only one mentioned in passing that OV-10A aircraft had joined the team.

Whatever policy that had been applied has apparently been revised. A Navy photographer from COMNAVFORV PIO has been assigned to the squadron for a few days to record squadron ground and flight operations in preparation for some sort of public release from COMNAVFORV.

On Thursday, 5 June, a change of command was held in the VAL-4 hangar. CAPT Faulk assumed command of CTF-116 from CAPT Price. VADM Zumwalt presided over the ceremony, assisted by an Army band. The GAL-3 Sea Wolves scrambled two Huey's from just outside the hangar at midpoint of the ceremony. That afternoon, CAPT Tidd, COMNAVFORV Chief of Staff, returned to the hangar and examined an OV-10A display and spent $\frac{1}{2}$ hour discussing squadron operations and capabilities of the aircraft.

The same night, the area received another mortar attack of short duration. None fell near the Bronco aircraft, although one round fell on the perimeter of the Navy base. The VNAF base received the most damage with a large part of the mess hall demolished. The enlisted personnel classify the mess hall casualty as a negligible loss.

Reported June 14, 1969

Flight crews were quite busy the first few days of the week and achieved good results on some significant targets. In at least two instances, the Navy Broncos were solely responsible for permanently disrupting a small troop concentration and curtailing whatever tactical preparations that were in progress.

They have on several occasions worked with USAF F-100 aircraft on the same target, directed by U.S. Army or Air Force FACs. Frequently,

they are called into an area and directed on target by U.S. Army OH-6 helicopters (the Hughes LOH - for some reason called LOCHs here). These are not FAC aircraft but Visual Reconnaissance (VR) vehicles assigned to various Army command and staff levels, and strike clearance authority is often aboard the OH-6.

These very agile little helos are flown by some spirited and aggressive pilots, and form an effective tactical team with the OV-10A. Recently, a ground reconnaissance team flushed several VC troops who retreated to a bunker complex. An OH-6 appeared on the scene, followed shortly by a flight of two Broncos (under the rules of engagement, this was a "troops in contact" situation and Navy air support was authorized).

The ground troops were unable to indicate which bunker in the complex the VC had hidden in, but the low-flying OH-6 was able to identify the specific bunker for the Broncos overhead by following the footsteps in the mud. After demolishing this bunker, the others were systematically destroyed by Zuni rockets.

Damage was confirmed by the sporty OH-6 who returned over the target and made a leisurely close-up inspection of the area. These helicopters are unarmed but they are much superior to the gunships (or any other helicopter) in maneuverability, acceleration, and rate-of-climb. The Navy pilots describe them as hummingbirds and enjoy working with them.

On the operational unit level, there is much cooperation and attempt at coordination among the Navy air and surface units, U.S. Army and USAF FAC's, U.S. Army Sector Advisers, Army Aerial Reconnaissance, and USAF Air Liaison Officers within the rules of engagement and roles and missions confines that apply to the various commands. They often seek out the

other's capabilities, availability, and communications channels in order to discover means for improving their own operational effectiveness.

To a limited but significant degree, VAL-4 air operations have expanded in several areas beyond the squadrons primary mission in this respect. Sometimes the nature or scope of unsanctioned operational arrangements may expand beyond policy boundaries where it can no longer be ignored at staff levels, where those who are responsible for and must concern themselves with diplomatic and military political considerations may apply restraint. The loss of two HAL-3 helicopters late last April over the Cambodian Border involved such circumstances aggravated by inexperienced crews. The two Navy squadrons in the Delta, though, are probably allowed more latitude than many air units operating in-country.

The structure, organization, and integration of the CTF-116 air units (VAL-4, HAL-3, and FASU) has been a subject of lively discussion since HAL-3 headquarters was moved from Vung Tau to Binh Thuy last month. One key issue involves the required level of intermediate maintenance support.

VAL-4 is capable of handling their own requirements in most cases where this may not be the case for HAL-3 when the squadron acquires and maintains their own Navy helicopters and are no longer supported by U.S. Army civilian contract maintenance.

Personnel requirements, operating costs, mission effectiveness, numbers and types of aircraft are ingredients all being stirred in the same pot, seasoned by the involvement of a few non-aviator officers. There are many options under consideration and even a general direction is not expected to be defined until completion of a conference at COMNAVFORV in Saigon, commencing 23 June.

The composition, size, and location of VAL-4 may or may not be affected but the least to be expected (from this side of world) is deployment of the squadron at the same strength level for another two years, subject to policy on the Washington scene.

Reported June 21, 1969

Air operations have been somewhat intensive most of the week. The ready alert crews have been scrambled frequently, twice in one night on two occasions. VC activity appears to be on the upswing in several local areas. One area less than a mile south of the VNAF base was bombed at night by F-100 aircraft twice this week.

Navy Broncos taking off from the VNAF base at night are frequently fired on from this area, as well as the area just north of the field which is supposedly friendly territory. One Popular Forces (PF) outpost 11 miles down the Bassac River has born the brunt of repeated and concentrated attacks during the past three weeks.

Several nights ago the Navy Broncos were scrambled about 11:00 p.m. to support the outpost defenses and worked over the area until the attack ceased around 1:30 a.m. At 3:00 a.m., the outpost was again under attack and the same crews were scrambled again. The forces began to retreat in sampans along the canals around 4 a.m., but this time there were other aircraft over the area, including a USAF "Snoopy" (C47 gunship) with a large number of flares (the OV-10A flights normally carry one flare pod on night missions with eight flares that are dropped in pairs). Movement of the sampans was then limited by flare intervals and they were forced to hide along the banks of the canals during illumination periods. The "Black Pony" flight leader caught one sampan on the open water when a flare illuminated and dispatched it with a Zuni rocket amidship (the

Zuni was equipped with a 48-pound warhead with a point-detonated fuze). There was nothing but rubble on the water after the blast.

The withdrawal was routed and a number of retreating forces probably never reached their destination before daybreak. Air attacks are not often this dramatic. Pilots frequently attack bunkers, treelines, and hooches, and often do not know the full extent of damage inflicted unless a ground recon team enters the area shortly after the attack.

For the past week both DET ALPHA and DET BRAVO have been providing night air cover for Navy Riverine operations that have recently extended north to the Tay Ninh area, about 100 miles north of Binh Thuy and 60 miles northwest of Saigon. The aircraft are configured with the centerline fuel tank for these missions. The operational orders permit fire support for U.S. Army troops as well as Navy units if requested, but only a limited number of strikes have been made on these missions.

This is a very active area involving NVA troops and the situation gets rather fluid at night. The location of friendly and enemy elements is often questionable, except for the Navy boats which are known to be on the waterways. Communication channels are also new and complex. Pilots report having observed obvious engagements on the ground where air support was probably desired, but were unable to identify or query the ground unit by operating through the Naval Control Center. If the missions continue, these problems will fade away as the operational units become more familiar with the others operations and communication channels.

Reduction of Naval Forces in Vietnam by 1200 personnel as reported by U.S. newspapers will apply mostly to the FIRST SEA LORDS Command (Riverine Forces). Most of the personnel will be released from the CTF-116 (Game Warden) River Patrol Force (PBRs) and some from the CTF-115 (Market Time) Coastal Patrol Force as the boats and vessels are

turned over to the Vietnamese. The air units are not involved.

Reported June 27, 1969

After the CTF-116 change of command on the morning of 5 June, 1969, CAPT Tidd, Chief of Staff, COMNAVFORV, returned to the hangar area in the afternoon for a leisurely briefing on the OV-10A, its ordnance and operational capabilities. He commented that they had been hearing much about feats of the Bronco on the staff level and that the squadron had a "good machine." His parting comment was " - keep up the fine work."

The ordnance displayed included 5-inch Zuni rockets, 2.75 rockets, MK24 flares, 20mm and 7.62mm ammunition. These are weapons employed by VAL-4 and they have been quite effective. The two Zuni warheads displayed were the MK32 ATAP and MK24 HE heads, both weighing 48 pounds. The MK188 point-detonated fuze is used with the MK32 warhead, and a penetration plug is installed on the nose of the base-fuzed MK24 warhead.

The squadron also has recently been using a proximity fuze that provides an air burst for the Zuni. The longer 2.75 rocket is equipped with either a WP M156 warhead (13 pounds), an HE 151 warhead (13 pounds), or a six pound HE MK1 head.

Reported 5 July 1969

Operational application of the Navy Bronco squadron has been steadily increasing with more effective utilization of the aircraft fire power. The squadron has been cited on several occasions for outstanding contribution to a successful operation. Subsequent to the operation described when a near-by Popular Forces outpost was in danger of being overrun, a personal message from VADM Zumwalt commended the squadron.

It is quoted in part since other parts of the message were classified: "The cool professionalism displayed by all concerned in strict fire discipline,

rapid response to an observed beleaguerment of friendly forces and tenacity in defeating the enemy is a source of pride to us all. Your superbly coordinated efforts have accomplished a significant defeat to the enemy and encouraged our allies. Well done!"

Wednesday night, a Buddhist holiday, was quite lively. Aircraft drew ground fire from every populated area they flew over. The perimeter of the Binh Thuy base complex resembled a July Fourth display of fireworks, with streams of tracer pouring upwards from a number of sites all evening and into the night.

Most of the fire originated in surrounding populated areas where return fire was denied. However, the VAL-4 Black Ponies had their holiday on July 4th. From midmorning until late at night, all the Det Alpha aircraft at Binh Thuy were on the ground only long enough to rearm and refuel.

A quote from the squadron Plan of the Day best describes the action:

"On July 4th, the VAL-4 DET A flew 28.1 flight hours, launching 13 aircraft during the period of 1000 to 2200. During this period of time, over 12,500 rounds of gun and rocket ammo was expended. Well done to the maintenance and pilot crews involved and a HAPPY FOURTH to Charlie, who lost 5 men, 46 structures, 6 bunkers and four sampans."

There were many probably casualties in the structures, bunkers, and sampans. The entire operation was conducted with six aircraft without a discrepancy that would affect the mission readiness of the aircraft.

The pilots who have been awarded Air Medals so far received their awards over the weekend at change of command ceremonies at both Binh

Thuy and Vung Tau. LCDR A. Schaeur is now OinC of the Binh Thuy detachment and the Vung Tau detachment is commanded by LCDR D. J. Florko.

Reported July 12, 1969

Operational activities have continued to run at a relatively high level. Enemy activity has been increasing both on the local scene and in outlying areas. Another mortar attack on the VNAF Binh Thuy Base did little damage the other night (fortunately, there is no high ground near-by from which spotters can direct an attack).

The following night three probing attacks were made on the base perimeter and several sapper charges were set off in Ben Xe Moi and Can Tho, killing four and wounding a large number. These areas are now off limits.

Engagements of the surface forces have been occurring more frequently and the squadron has been called on for air support in most of the incidents. A couple of months ago two or three days may go by before the ready alert was scrambled, now it is unusual if a day goes by without one or two scrambles.

A number of new personnel arrived for duty with the Fleet Air Service Unit. FASU is gradually assuming intermediate maintenance responsibility for the VAL-4 OV-10A aircraft.

Reported July 19, 1969

BUNO 155490 was shot down by enemy ground fire Saturday night, July 12. Both pilots are classified as missing in action but there is little reason for hope. The airplane was observed to be receiving fire at 2700 feet altitude, enter a shallow dive and strike the top of a mountain 1700 feet high. The wreckage spewed down the side of the mountain, an area that is occupied by enemy forces.

DET ALPHA AND NAS BINH THUYBUNO

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DET BRAVO VUNG TAUBUNO

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OV-10A BUNO STRIKE - BUNO 155490 was shot down by enemy fire in the Chau Doc area about 50 miles northwest of Binh Thuy on the night of 12 July. Both pilots, LT Aubrey Martin and LTJG Roy Sinkkink, are officially classified as missing in action.

The aircraft was in trail position behind the flight leader at 2700 feet altitude when it was hit by ground fire as observed by a helo gunship crew, behind and below the OV-10A. The airplane was observed to descend in a shallow dive and strike the top of a mountain, elevation about 1700 feet. Explosion and fire ensued. No ejection seat rocket flame or inflated parachutes were in evidence. Air cover remained over the area all night and the next day, monitoring emergency radio frequencies, but received no signals.

A survey of the crash site from the air the next day revealed that the aircraft had broken up upon initial contact with the top of the mountain and spewed parts over a wide area for several hundred yards down the mountainside. Since the mountainside and valley below are occupied by enemy forces and there is no suitable terrain to land a helicopter in the area, there is no intention at this time for further investigation at the crash site.

Since there was no radio transmission from the aircraft and that it appeared to be out of control after being hit by the ground fire, it is

concluded that both pilots probably received fatal or incapacitating injuries prior to the crash.

Reported July 26, 1969

Following the trend in other parts of the country, military activities in the Mekong Delta appear to be generally slowing to some extent, but intensive local engagements are of short duration, and continue to occur.

In one engagement near the Cambodian Border this week, one of the river patrol squadrons lost three PBR boats and several personnel. On Thursday afternoon two U.S. helicopters and a Vietnamese A-37 were downed by enemy action, all within 18 miles of Binh Thuy. Yet the Binh Thuy Black Pony ready alert crews remained on the ground almost three days without a scramble.

The armed patrols have been more or less routine with targets limited to bunkers and suspected enemy positions. However, one patrol was successful in finding a lucrative target on Friday. The patrol entered a "free fire zone" at sunset with prior clearance to fire on any observed targets. The two pilots, LCDR Schauer and LCDR Zagorts, spotted three sampans in a large canal that immediately began evasive action by moving in circular and figure-eight patterns (difficult targets to track). All three boats were sunk with 20mm ammo and Zuni rockets with proximity (air burst) fuzes. A fourth boat, camouflaged against the canal bank, was damaged. The action occurred in the "Three Sisters" area near the Cambodian Border, a major infiltration area where a squadron aircraft was shot down on the night of 19 July.

Night operations in the Tay Ninh area have been discontinued since the Navy mission has been completed and the surface forces withdrawn. The Vung Tau detachment has been flying a daily 3- or 4-hour patrol over the Saigon

River since mid-May when a number of ships were fired upon as they negotiated the Long Tau Channel en route to Saigon. One was sunk in the channel several weeks ago.

The aircraft carry external fuel and a full load of ordnance but the ships are seldom fired on when air cover is overhead. It is a boring operation and considered a waste of assets since a smaller, lightly armed aircraft could accomplish the mission with the same results. Attempts to relinquish the mission have been unsuccessful since the river is a major waterway, a Navy responsibility.

Beginning Monday, the patrol will be made a single aircraft, twice a day, with only the M60 guns loaded. One Marine air observer has been assigned to fly in the rear seat on every flight. This permits one aircraft and three pilots to be applied to other ready alert and patrol operations. The loss of two pilots and an aircraft a week ago has presented a potential problem in meeting operational commitments. There is also some consideration to be given to expanding utilization of the Navy Broncos.

Squadron personnel were delighted to see the publicity releases concerning the "Black Ponies" in the STARS AND STRIPES and the ROCKWELL INTERNATIONAL NEWS.

Reported August 2, 1969

Although the level of hostilities continues to decline and scramble of the ready alert crews occurs less frequently, approval for an increase in flight hour allocation for this and subsequent months has resulted in some increase in flight operations. The Binh Thuy DET ALPHA is now normally scheduled for three armed patrols each day in addition to special cover operations off and on. DET BRAVO at Vung Tau is flying two patrols daily, in addition to the single-aircraft Saigon River and Rung Sat Special Zone patrol.

Except for a couple of incidents, air strikes have been limited to suspected enemy positions and free fire zones. Early in the week, one patrol destroyed four sampans and another was destroyed later in the week. The sampan traffic in this area (Chau Doe) appears to be diminishing or new tactics are being employed. Ordnance is also being expended more judiciously, especially rockets. The logistics staff people are cautious lest the military budget squeeze cause a shortage of ordnance. The intelligence community is still predicting a possible major offensive (as usual) and the operations types are sensitive about ordnance stocks and pipeline.

Air strikes are often placed on suspected enemy positions or known positions at night where the results of the strike are never known unless a ground sweep of the area is made reasonably soon after the strike. Occasionally a report confirming damage and casualties will be received through the chain of command days after the strike, but not often.

One such report, based on captured enemy documents, was received this week concerning an operation several weeks ago near the Van Co Dong River in Long On Province, when a Navy Seal Team became surrounded and could not reach the extraction point on the river bank. Nor could the boats reach the pickup area.

The event occurred at night and the Navy Broncos were scrambled from the Vung Tau detachment. The night air strike demanded exceptional accuracy since the SEALS could not reveal their position, and the local weather conditions presented a low ceiling and poor visibility.

Although the ceiling was down to 500 feet when the flight arrived over the target and the situation denied the use of flares, the outline of the river bank, guarded use of a strobe light, and whispered radio transmissions

from the SEALs provided enough ground reference to commence the attack. (The strobe light provides only an initial reference since it can only be seen from directly above as the aircraft passes over).

The initial attacks were limited to the SUU-11 mini-gun pod and M60 sponson guns (the aircraft were not equipped with the MK4 60mm pod) because of the low ceiling. Later, the ceiling lifted to 1500 feet and Zuni rockets were employed. (1500 feet is normally the minimum pullout altitude for Zuni delivery in order to avoid the fragmentation pattern of the weapon. In this case it was necessary to roll in at 1500 feet, track, fire, and pull out as quickly as possible.) An extraction route to the river was progressively cleared, with the SEALs moving along behind until they were finally able to reach the boats and depart the area with no casualties.

The extent of enemy casualties was unknown (only one was detected by the SEAL team on its way out in the darkness) until a personal "attaboy" message from COMNAVFORV was received the other day, citing documented evidence that the enemy had lost 60 troops, the highest number of casualties inflicted by any previous air strike (presumably meaning Navy strikes in the Delta), and commending the "Black Pony" flight for its precise fire under adverse conditions.

Several messages from other operational commands citing the accuracy and effectiveness of the "Black Ponies" have been received by the squadron. Success of the operation described above would not have been possible without the ability to work in very close to the target and perform rapid sequence attacks, with the heavy punch of the Zuni rocket. Under these conditions, armed helos excel fixed-wing aircraft in locating and maneuvering over the target, but are lacking in time over target and fire power.

In this instance, the mission would have been a failure if it had been necessary for the attack aircraft to depart from the target area due to fuel or ordnance limitations, prior to disrupting the enemy forces enough to permit a complete avenue of escape for the friendly forces.

Assignment of additional special missions for VAL-4 by CTF-116 Staff has expanded squadron operations to some extent. Several missions have been scheduled over areas to the south that have normally been covered by helo detachments in the local area. These flights require external fuel, which does not impose as much limitation on ordnance load since installation of the small 2.75 rocket pods adjacent to the fuel tank has been approved.

The squadron has been advised that USAF FAC Aircraft will no longer be permitted to direct Navy air strikes - a roles and missions decision. The OV-10A with a rear seat navigator is quite capable of working without a FAC, but any attack is more effective with a FAC who is familiar with the target area and expedient in obtaining strike clearance.

A few new enlisted men have reported in to VAL-4 after having completed OV-10A training with VS-41 at NAS North Island. A number of personnel have swelled the ranks of the Fleet Air Service Unit (FASU) during the last month. The unit was formerly commanded by a lieutenant with two other officers and 30 enlisted men. Now it is commanded by a commander with 11 officers and about 80 enlisted men, more than the number of squadron maintenance personnel. The role of FASU is to provide facilities and intermediate maintenance for VAL-4 and HAL-3.

VAL-4 has provided intermediate as well as organizational maintenance for 14 aircraft with a personnel loading to support 10 aircraft. They are to receive an additional complement to reach the support level for 12 aircraft.

HAL-3 has 320 maintenance personnel to support 31 Huey helicopters at Binh Thuy (with an additional 200 assigned to detachment locations). About 100 more enlisted personnel are expected to increase the FASU ranks by the end of the year.

Reported 9 August 1969

The maintenance organization is still enjoying a slack period even though flight operations are at a level near that of last June when the squadron flew 1010 hours. There are less scrambles but more patrols and air cover missions are being scheduled since an increase in allocated flight hours was approved.

The number of significant air strikes continues to be few, although the "Black Ponies" destroyed 12 sampans this week. One flight accounted for 7 sampans and four structures. Most of these strikes are now in free fire zones, territory under complete control of the VC, rather than in support of a specific operation. Riverine Forces and ARVN ground sweep and recon patrol activities have not declined significantly but there appears to be less frequent contact with enemy forces.

CDR M. S. Schuman, VAL-4 Executive Officer, will assume command of the squadron on 6 September. CDR Winans, the present CO, has received orders to the Dahlgren Weapons Development Lab. The next officer to leave will be LCDR Al Schauer, present OinC of Det Alpha, in early October. He has received orders to the USS Midway. He intends to spend a day or two of his leave in Columbus. CDR Kline, formerly of NATC Pax River, is expected to report aboard the first week in September to assume the duties of executive officer after the change of command.

Reported August 22, 1969

Aspects of OV-10A Armament and Attack Effectiveness

Application of the OV-10A Bronco in the light attack role by Light Attack Squadron Four in the South Vietnam IV Corps Area has proved the Bronco to be an excellent light attack aircraft in every sense of the term. Air support for the U.S. Navy Game Warden operations in the Mekong Delta was limited to armed UH-1B helos prior to the arrival of VAL-4 on the scene. The Navy Bronco aircraft and the squadron soon developed a sound reputation for providing highly effective and accurate firepower that was previously not available to the river patrol and amphibious forces.

The difference between the firepower of the Bronco and the armed helos is much greater than comparison of the Bronco to the A-1 Skyraider. The relatively heavy air strike capability is made possible by the employment of the 5-inch Zuni rocket and 20mm cannon. Without this armament or certain free-fall weapons, the Bronco would compare more closely to the armed helo and would probably be no more effective than the Huey Cobra gunship, from the standpoint of striking power.

Due to roles and missions dictates this squadron has not employed free-fall weapons. These weapons are controlled operationally and logistically in IV Corps by 7th Air Force.

Except for napalm, the VAL-4 pilots have seldom if ever encountered a target where free-fall demolition or fragmentation bombs would be more effective than a number of Zuni rockets. It is a more effective weapon against such targets as light structures, bunkers, sampans, and small troop concentrations. It is much more accurate since its trajectory is almost flat and it can be released at a much lower altitude.

In comparison to the tactics and ordnance presently employed by the squadron, the expected results would be wider flight patterns and longer intervals between target runs, greater lethal impact but less accuracy, and a lesser number of single ordnance units to deliver. The capability to place strikes close to friendly forces would be substantially degraded. Consequently, the Navy Bronco mission in South Vietnam is being accomplished most effectively by application of the tactics and ordnance presently employed by VAL-4.

Enemy activity has slacked off again somewhat, but flight operations have remained at a relatively high level at the Binh Thuy detachment and the Vung Tau detachment, each scheduling three two-plane patrols a day in addition to two ready alert aircraft and crews. Det Bravo also provides one aircraft for two daily patrols of the Saigon River Channel and the Binh Thue Det Alpha detachment schedules a few extra patrols to provide fire team leader training for the lesser experienced pilots who normally fly in the rear seat.

The pilots will begin rotating to shore duty stations in the near future and the new pilots will occupy the rear seats and fly wing position until qualified as fire team leaders. Experience background of most the new pilots is similar to those assigned to VS, VU, and VP squadrons. So far there has been none ordered to the squadron that has any significant attack experience.

A special mission was flown one night this week, coordinated with an Army Mohawk Recon Squadron. The Army Mohawk "Shadow," equipped with sensor equipment lead the Black Pony flight by several miles and reported likely targets observed on the sensor displays, targets that are not normally apparent at night. Results indicated that these tactics have some merit, but to be effective, the operation must be better coordinated with ground operational centers in order to obtain clearance to place a strike on a detected target within a few minutes.

Reported August 30, 1975

Aircraft utilization has increased significantly at the present sortie rate and the squadron is now operating near maximum capacity. When the aircraft complement is restored to 14 aircraft, utilization at the present level should result in about 1200 flying hours per month.

A total of 1105 hours were flown during the month of August with 13 aircraft. Most all the air strike reports were much of the same this week except for a night scramble from Det Alpha on 27 August. This strike resulted in another personal commendation message from COMNAVFORV.

The two-plane flight was credited with saving another outpost from being overrun by an enemy attacking force when adverse weather conditions denied the employment of TAC Air. This is the third such event for which the squadron has been commended.

These situations attest to the unique capability of the Bronco to conduct precise and effective air attacks under conditions that preclude conventional air strikes, and often very close to friendly forces when the ground situation is most critical. Maneuverability and slow-speed characteristics, the disruptive striking force of the Zuni rockets and 20mm ammunition and their permissive low-level delivery are primary aspects in the success of these missions.

Decommissioning of VAH-21 at Cam Ranh Bay several weeks ago has released a number of Navy SUU-11 gun pods for redistribution. They have been distributed among the Navy and Marine OV-10A activities. VAH-21 was a small squadron of P2V aircraft with special systems configurations.

CDR Schuman will assume command of VAL-4 at a change of command ceremony at Binh Thuy on Saturday, 6 September.

Reported September 6, 1969

Despite the fact that the weather has been worse than ever during the month of August, the squadron accumulated 656 sorties and 1105 flight hours during the month. Total hours was greater than that for last June when 14 aircraft were available. The utilization rate is now up to 85 hours per aircraft per month. This is about the peak operating level for the squadron, in terms of both maintenance and operations. The three pilots that were lost in combat have not been replaced yet and the number of pilots is now as limiting as the number of aircraft available. To maintain the daily ready alert crews and a squadron duty officer requires five pilots at each detachment. The others fly three or four patrols a day at each detachment.

CDR V. W. Klein arrived this week and assumed duties of squadron executive officer at a change of command ceremony on 6 September. CDR Schuman, the former executive officer assumed command of the squadron from CDR Winans. There were a number of CTF-116 and COMNAVFORV representatives at the ceremony and CDR Winans farewell address paid high tribute to the qualities of the Bronco aircraft.

I have received the 1 September edition of the COLUMBUS DISPATCH with the article on limitations of the OV-10A in combat. Squadron pilots are appalled at this turn of events, and the half-truths and errors of omission in the article, as well as concealment of the application of the airplane by the Navy.

Although the monsoon season is supposedly nearing its end, the weather seems to worsen weekly. The season has actually been mild compared to what was expected, except for the last few weeks when it often rains heavily all day and night. The adverse weather also extends over wider areas. Yet only one flight was aborted last week due to weather.

It was a night patrol that covered a mountainous area south of Chau Doc, and the patrol returned when it was no longer able to maintain ground contact. Since the squadron has been operating in country, only six or seven flights have been aborted or cancelled because of weather, and only twice have they been forced to divert to another base upon completion of the flight.

More consideration of capabilities of the Navy Bronco aircraft is being given to tactical application of the squadron. The primary mission of the squadron was to provide air support for the ground interdiction forces, but mission planning now is tending more towards utilizing the air elements directly as an interdiction force.

A recent shift in tactics now requires more frequent patrols, all at night, over a specific suspected heavy infiltration area along the Cambodian Border. The number of flares carried has been tripled so that the patrols are entirely self-sustaining for any eventuality.

Also, illumination support by USAF flareships that are normally airborne and on call at night are often not available or relatively inept under poor weather conditions. Proper placement of flares is most expeditiously accomplished by a maneuverable aircraft in the hands of the attack pilot who knows exactly where he wants the flare. The present night ordnance configurations permit either pilot of the two aircraft to drop flares.

One significant air strike occurred this past week when ARVN Forces making a ground sweep encountered enemy troops and called a Black Pony patrol for air support. The strength of the enemy force was not known until the ground forces entered the area following the air strike. They found a complex of two large structures and a dozen or so bunkers that had been destroyed by the air strike.

Three replacement pilots have arrived and eight more are expected this month. A number of squadron personnel that were scheduled for rotation early next year may now depart in December. Formal classroom training is planned for new squadron personnel next month.

Reported September 27, 1975 69

Each detachment continues to fly three patrols every night and a few extra day patrols have been added to the schedule. These day patrols double as in-country training flights for those pilots that have recently arrived from the VS-41 training squadron at North Island. Seven new pilots have arrived and two more are expected in the near future. The additional pilots is a welcome relief to those who have been flying around the clock for two or three days at a time.

The night patrols are still relegated to specific areas as apposed to the wide-ranging patrol routes formerly flown. The night patrols are coordinated with the SLAR-equipped Army Mohawks from near-by Can Tho Army Base. (The 244th Surveillance Airplane Company of the 1st Aviation Brigade).

The results have not been significant, largely because of the adverse weather conditions. Proximity of the border requires careful navigation (an inadvertent sojourn over the border not only poses diplomatic repercussions but there is a more immediate problem of a formidable anti-air environment) and visual acquisition of a target located by radar in another aircraft is difficult under such weather conditions. Frequently identified targets are too close to the border to permit air strike clearance and the whims of the local Sector Chief must also be reckoned with.

Mission responsibility and rules of engagement have recently become an issue again. An attempt to apply the Navy air assets in more direct support of Navy units is one of the reasons for limiting the night patrols to specific areas.

September 27, 1969 (cont.)

Primary mission is in support of River Patrol Force Boat and Seals. When OV-10A's are nearing completion of their patrol and no ordnance has been expended, their Controller NOC (River Patrol Force Naval Operation Center) will authorize the flight leader to contact the U. S. Army or USA Advisory of Vietnam Forces to see if they have any targets of opportunity available. It is under these conditions that enable the Black Ponies to conduct a strike on just about every mission.

A recent survey of "Black Pony" air strikes revealed that 75% of the strikes had been in support of U.S. Army or Vietnamese forces at Det Alpha, and 25% of the Det Bravo strikes supported forces other than U.S. or Vietnamese Navy.

Consequently, only half of the air support provided was in direct support of Navy units. Supporting the other ground forces often results in an incursion across tactical boundaries into the TAC Air regime as defined by the rules of engagement. But ground forces in a critical situation who are aware of the Bronco fire power will often request the "Black Ponies" from the Navy Operations Center in the area because of the quick response the squadron can provide.

Occasionally they have called for both Broncos and TAC Air; and this usually results in a complaint from 7th Air Force that is aired on IV Corps Combined Command level. In the last incident of this kind, one flight of "Black Ponies" was over the target (scrambled from Binh Thuy) in 15 minutes. The USAF O-2 FAC in the area merely orbited the scene and observed the strike since they are no longer permitted to direct Navy air strikes.

When the TAC Air element arrived on the scene almost one hour after the Broncos left the ground troops had already transited the area and there was nothing left of the target to justify more ordnance. This is particularly frustrating to the TAC units since the number of available targets has been diminishing for the last month or so.

BuNo 155491 at the Vung Tau Det Bravo sustained combat damage on 27 September when a small caliber round passed through the RH wing leading edge forward of the spar at wing station 220. The damage was discovered on post-flight inspection and the pilots had not observed any ground fire during the mission.

Reported October 4, 1969

The daily flight schedule has been increased somewhat. Each detachment is now flying two daytime patrols in addition to the three night patrols, interspersed with training flights for the new pilots. When occasionally there are not enough aircraft available to meet the scheduled requirements and maintain a ready alert at each detachment, the airborne patrol doubles as a ready alert flight until another pair of aircraft return and are rearmed and refueled.

The squadron is committed to an average of about 20 flights a day, plus the ready alert scrambles and occasional logistics flights. During the month of September 674 sorties were flown for a total of 1170 flight hours. However, the number of significant targets continues to be limited and the patrols often return with a full load of ordnance.

Intelligence reports continue to indicate a substantial increase in infiltration during the last few weeks (including regular NVA troops) but the number of troops in contact incidents in the Delta have not increased. One incident did occur this week that involved "Black Pony" air support for surface units in serious trouble.

Five PBR boats were ambushed from a small village along a canal. One of the boats ran aground and the crew sustained a number of casualties. The "Black Pony" patrol arrived overhead at the beginning of the attack and suppressed the enemy fire while the casualties were recovered from the stricken PBR and the other four boats retreated.

The alert crews were scrambled from Binh Thuy and the patrol flight delivered remaining ordnance on the village while the scrambled flight was en route. This flight arrived on the scene shortly after the first flight

had expended all ordnance and completed total destruction of the village. Real estate damage consisted of total destruction of 21 structures, 3 sampans, and a large secondary explosion. This was accomplished by delivery of 31 Zuni rockets, 90 2.75 rockets, 300 rounds of 20mm, and 5500 rounds of 7.62mm carried by the four aircraft involved in the action.

Otherwise air strikes were limited for occasional sampans detected at night and suspected enemy troop locations, except for destruction of an unoccupied VC village. In the latter case, a Navy SEAL Team discovered the recently occupied village in VC country, requested an air strike to destroy the structures and bunkers, then withdrew. Since there were no troops in contact, the flight was delayed 20 minutes while the aircraft were reconfigured with all Zuni rockets (20 on each of the two aircraft). One Zuni misfired but the other 39 rockets were delivered on target.

The Navy Binh Thuy Fleet Air Detachment (consisting of FASU, HAL-3, and VAL-4) continues to swell with personnel and support equipment as the Fleet Air Service Unit (FASU) continues to expand in accordance with the plans of COMFAIRWESTPAC in Japan.

Experience at that detachment has demonstrated that the OV-10A can be operated in such an environment indefinitely with a need for a central maintenance base only for major repairs.

The end of September brought about another change in detachment Officers in Charge. LCDR R. H. Ballard relieved LCDR A. D. Schauer at Det Alpah, and LCDR J. A. Butterfield relieved LCDR D. J. Florko at Det Bravo. LCDR Schauer returns to CONUS on 6 October and intends to spend a day or two in Columbus the week of 13 October discussing VAL-4 operations with company personnel.

Reported October 11, 1969

Night patrols over suspected high infiltration areas continue to be scheduled except for one night last week when no night patrols were scheduled. All day patrols were scheduled for the Binh Thuy Det Alpha to provide overhead cover for a number of assault boats that had been reassigned and were transiting to the southern part of the Delta. Ambush of the boats is always of concern when they must transit through unfamiliar territory of questionable security conditions, and frequently through narrow canals where it is impossible to maneuver.

When a boat runs aground, air cover is maintained overhead until the boat is recovered, or the crew is recovered and the boat is destroyed. These situations sometimes require an all night vigil by the Navy Broncos and armed helos.

Although the night patrols result in less air strikes than day patrols, there have been indications that they have been effective in deterring the infiltration of troops and equipment. Captured enemy documents and personnel indicate that they cease movement when the aircraft are in the area. The expenditure of flares has increased sharply since the "Black Pony" flights provide illumination for the boats in blockade positions or teams in ambush sites when movement is detected. One aircraft in the patrol flight has been carrying two SUU-40 flare dispensers along with other ordnance on every station.

Reported October 18, 1969

Flight schedules at both detachments continue to specify one day patrol and three night patrols (in addition to ready alert aircraft) at each detachment, with occasional air cover operations. Regularity of the scheduled patrols has tended to increase the average mission time.

VAL-4 and HAL-3 are now providing continuous nighttime coverage over specific areas of high infiltration. Movement of enemy troops and material across the border and south toward the Ca Mao Peninsula has been steadily increasing with a corresponding increase in the number of air strikes. However, since the patrols no longer roam from sector to sector requesting targets, a number of aircraft still return with a full load of ordnance. The weather is gradually improving as the dry season approaches, but it still presents a problem when the patrols are over hilly or mountainous terrain.

The ready alert crews were unusually active Thursday and Friday when both detachments scrambled for a total of nine times. Two of the scramble strikes resulted in a BDA count of 49 troops, which prompted another "attaboy" message from Commander Task Force 116.

Reported October 25, 1969

Night patrols over specified areas continue to make up majority of the scheduled flights at both operating detachments, interspersed by one daily daylight patrol and occasional special air cover missions. Pilot boredom has been relieved somewhat by an increase in activities on the ground that has resulted in an increase in the number of air strikes. Most of these targets have been groups of sampans infiltrating across the border and moving to the south. Reduction of the amount of rainfall has limited the number of navigable waterways, increasing the density of illicit traffic in some areas.

One patrol last week eliminated seven of a group of eleven sampans that were initially detected by an Army Mohawk recon aircraft. The number of attacks and ambushes on the PBR patrol boats has also increased, which has resulted in an increase in the number of scrambles for the ready alert crews. Because of the increase in activities it is anticipated that the monthly accumulation of flight hours this month will exceed the level allocated.

Reported November 1, 1969

Preliminary operational statistical data indicates that the squadron flew 742 sorties for a total of 1,337 flight hours during the month of October. This was accomplished with 12 aircraft since BuNo 155494 was in NORS(G) status all month. Consequently, the actual utilization rate was over 110 hours per month per aircraft, but since the NORS(G) aircraft was on board, the reported rate will probably be slightly over 100 hours. Total flight hours is in excess of flight hour allocation for the squadron. Without the limitation, two more daily patrols would have been added to the flight schedule, which would have resulted in nearly 1500 hours for the month.

Although the flight schedule has remained much the same during the month, the incidence of troops in contact has gradually been increasing the past two weeks or so and the ready alert crews are scrambled more frequently. There have been several instances when one detachment has scrambled 3 or 4 times in one 24-hour period.

The night of 31 October was quite active for Det Alpha at Binh Thuy. The second night patrol had been airborne only 10 minutes when they were diverted to the Rach Gia area where two PBR craft (with troops aboard) were ambushed and badly hit. The Bronco flight attacked the enemy positions while the wounded were evacuated by Army "Dustoff" medivac helos.

When their ordnance was expended the flight returned to Binh Thuy where the pilots immediately took off again in two ready and waiting aircraft, and returned to the scene to put in another strike (during night operations the continuous patrol flights also act as an airborne ready alert, otherwise a scramble team would have relieved the returning flight on station.) Another strike was placed on the same area by the morning patrol the next day.

Reported November 8, 1969

The number of air strikes on the night patrols are still gradually increasing, but the number of ready alert crew scrambles has slowed somewhat. The most significant action this week was one strike that resulted in destruction of 11 sampans. The airborne patrol was calling on various control frequencies for possible targets when a USAF FAC en route to his home base advised of the location of a group of 25 sampans apparently engaged in transport of illicit cargo.

The FAC had previously called for TAC Air, but after 40 minutes of waiting over the target, he was forced to leave the area because of low fuel. The "Black Ponies" found the sampans after the first flare illumination over the area and dispatched eleven.

Reported November 15, 1969

Movement of enemy troops and material, moving across the border and towards the southern part of the Delta, has steadily increased despite the concentration of boat blockades and patrols, and air patrols in the areas of high infiltration. The situation has resulted in a corresponding increase in the frequency of air strikes by the squadron patrol flights and scrambles for the ready alert crews on the ground.

About 80% of the flights are at night and the expenditure of para-flares has increased sharply during the past several weeks (each night patrol flight normally carries a total of 24, dropped in pairs). Illumination for the ground units has become an important part of the night missions. Quick response to a call for illumination by boat crews or SEALs in ambush positions has often proved quite effective and timely.

Reported November 22, 1969

The frequency of air strikes (and scrambles to some extent) by the night patrols is still steadily increasing. Whereas flights were often returning with a full load of ordnance a month ago, it seldom occurs now. Even so, the squadron was informed the other day that confirmed results of "Black Pony" air strikes during October exceeded that of any tactical air units in country (and I would imagine at a fraction of the expense). On one day last month two flights accounted for 45 enemy troops.

Sunday, 16 November, was a particularly active day for the Binh Thuy detachment that prompted another attaboy message from the task force commander the following morning. Seven scrambles were launched during a 12-hour period and three patrol flights were diverted that night to aid surface units in critical situations.

Reported November 29, 1969

Integration of 12 new pilots so far has presented the necessity of emphasizing certain operating procedures such as use of brakes, reverse thrust, engine start procedures, etc. Even though the initial VS-41 OV-10 training unit instructors trained with VAL-4, the two squadrons now employ different operating procedures in many instances.

The older squadron pilots seldom over use the brakes except to stop, which is why squadron aircraft were operated more than eight months before it became necessary to replace any brake linings or discs. Since the new pilots have been flying the past three weeks it has become necessary to rebuild 6 or 7 brake assemblies. Use of reverse thrust and nose wheel steering has been emphasized but it is expected to take a while to change habit patterns.

Unless external power is available both engines are still being started on battery to avoid inadvertent overload of the running generator. This normally requires 3 or 4 minutes to allow the batteries to recharge before starting the second engine to avoid a possible engine overtemp on start due to low battery power. Scramble aircraft are expected. Since time is critical the second engine is started on generator immediately after the first engine reaches 50% RPM.

The squadron continues to fly three night patrols and one or two day patrols at each detachment, with occasional air cover missions as required. Intelligence has verified that the enemy infiltrating units cease movement when the aircraft are in the vicinity and this tends to limit the number of air strikes. However they do not hesitate to attack the boats. Most of the Navy surface and air assets are now employed along the infiltration route close to the Cambodian Border.

The effectiveness of the patrol boats in stemming the flow of enemy personnel and supplies has precipitated a sharp increase in the aggressiveness and frequency of attacks on the boats during the past three weeks and the friendly casualty rate has increased accordingly. The duration of these attacks is quite short and air support must arrive overhead in 10 or 15 minutes to catch the enemy unit before it disperses.

The flights are permitted to depart from the assigned patrol routes to assist any troops in contact where they are more apt to find the enemy unit still in position. A successful encounter of this nature occurred last Friday night which prompted another "attaboy" message from VADM Zumwalt, COMNAVFORV. The message was quoted in the squadron Plan of the Day:

"On the night of 28 November 1969, OV-10A's were diverted from routine patrol mission to assist troops in contact near Dong Tam which resulted in 55 KIA (body count) with 30 KIA by air. This heavy loss of personnel cripples the enemy's offensive capabilities and destroys his morale and willingness to fight. The Dong Tam action indicates, once again, that VAL-4's reputation for immediate response, aggressiveness and outstanding aerial proficiency is well founded. Well done and keep striking." (s) Vice Admiral Zumwalt.

A quiet bow might also be taken by those who conceived and designed the OV-10A Bronco. This was another situation where success of the mission was largely due to the ability to work down low and close to the ground forces with a very respectable amount of firepower.

This was the third such personal message from the admiral, and messages expressing appreciation for Navy Bronco air support from Task Force 115 and 116 units and other non-Navy forces (including Australian and ARVN units) are received at a rate of 2 or 3 per month. The fact that this type of close air support was not available before the advent of the Bronco is one good reason why the ground forces sincerely appreciate their support.

The armed helos can work even closer with the forces but do not carry enough firepower to do much damage or enough fuel to maintain a sustained attack, while TAC Air (jets) is much less accurate and inadequate in response for this type of warfare.

While obtaining information from the flight data records for this report it was noted that one aircraft carried a large part of the load on Sunday, 16 November, when Det Alpha at Binh Thuy put in 12 air strikes in one day. BuNo 155494 flew one patrol flight and six scramble missions that day. This one aircraft delivered 84 Zuni rockets, 133 2.75 rockets, and 21,000 rounds of 7.62 ammo in one day - total ordnance weight in excess of 12,000 pounds.

After two cancellations during the past four months, MAJGEN Allen Burdette, CG 1st Aviation Brigade, finally paid a visit to the squadron this week. He looked over the aircraft/ordnance display and remarked that he was familiar with the OV-10A and was impressed by all the "good things" he had been hearing about the squadron and its application of the aircraft.

Reported December 6, 1969

The squadron flew over 1,200 hours last month and almost 700 sorties. Damage inflicted on enemy forces continues to be impressive although the results for November were slightly less than that for the month of October.

Activities in the U Minh Forest Area, a swampy area south of Rach Gia on the western coast, have steadily been increasing the past several weeks. The alert crews at the Binh Thuy detachment have been scrambled repeatedly during the last few days to support the Vietnamese Marines operating in that area.

There are several U.S. Marine Advisors with the VN unit who call for the air support and normally specifically request "Black Pony" support. If their preference is ignored and TAC Air is assigned the target, the advisors wait a reasonable amount of time, and if the air support does not appear, they ask for "Ponies" again and upgrade the situation to "urgent."

Consequently, the Navy Broncos usually end up putting in the strike, but it often results in the same old problem of TAC Air belatedly arriving over the target to find that the Navy had already been there. In one extreme case, a scrambled Navy Bronco flight put in one strike, returned, rearmed and put in a second strike, and the TAC Air unit had still not arrived when they departed from the target area.

All during this period, a USAF FAC was on the scene waiting for the USAF strike aircraft, a period of about two hours. Since the USAF FACs are not permitted to direct Navy strikes, he could only orbit and observe the action.

These situations occur frequently and repeatedly demonstrate the fallacy of the USAF concept of close air support in this type of warfare.

Distinguished visitors this week included two Navy captains from 7th Fleet, Task Force 77 Carrier Division (number unknown), USS Hancock. CAPT Scott, the Air Wing 21 commander, and CAPT Joe Tully (well known to many Columbus personnel), CARDIV Chief of Staff.

An interesting discussion concerning close air support results with Bronco aircraft versus fleet attack jets took place, and it finally ended with CAPT Scott flying a mission with the "Black Ponies." The mission involved a lively air strike that resulted in destruction of a number of structures and bunkers, and the captain was much impressed. The main purpose of the flight was to demonstrate weapon delivery accuracy and how the Bronco can work on a target without an airborne FAC.

Reported December 13, 1969

Enemy activity in the Delta has been increasing during the last few weeks, especially in the U Minh Forest area near the western coast. However the night patrols have not been getting much new business, the result of enemy practice of staying put when aircraft are in the area. But the frequency of alert crew scrambles is increasing.

One flight was launched this week to support an outpost that was under mortar and ground attack in broad daylight, very unusual since almost all these attacks on the outposts occur during the night. One flight was scrambled about 3 a.m. in response to a call from an outpost under attack and found another outpost nearby in the same situation. They provided fire support for both. The only other aircraft on the scene was a "Spooky" gunship (C-47) although TAC Air had been called earlier. A preliminary report from the outposts indicated the enemy lost 65 troops in the engagement as a result of the air strike.

The enemy has identified the Navy Bronco aircraft with a curious label that leaves one with mixed emotions. A captured VC recently was injured and indicated that he had been wounded by a "Pigsty" aircraft. He identified a photo of the OV-10A as the aircraft that upset his military career. Squadron personnel mulling over the possible relationship of a pigsty to the Bronco find the only conclusion not totally undignified is that the box tail of the Bronco resembled a pen for animals. The captured subject indicated that the name is in common usage among the VC units.

Reported December 20, 1969

DET ALPHA AND NAS BINH THUY DET BRAVO VUNG TAU

155461	155463
155471	155472
155474	155475
155493	155491
155494	155497
155495	155503
155496	STRIKE

BUNO 155503 from the Vung Tau Detachment was lost on Saturday evening, 20 December 1969. The single aircraft was patrolling the Saigon Long Tau shipping channels with a pilot and Marine air observer aboard, under control of the Moon River Naval Operations Center.

The pilot advised the Center that he was descending to investigate a suspicious sampan at about 4:45 pm, and the Center was unable to contact the flight after that radio transmission. After twenty minutes of silence, the Vung Tau VAL-4 alert crew was scrambled to search for the missing aircraft. The burning wreckage site was spotted 10 minutes later in the swampy Rung Sat Special Zone, 8 miles north of Vung Tau. There were no parachute canopies visible in the area and no beeping or voice transmissions were detected on the survival radio frequencies.

At the present time there is no factual evidence to indicate the cause of the crash, but the area is definitely hostile where ground fire is often encountered. ARVN troops are being inserted in the area to set up a perimeter around the crash site and a Navy investigating and salvage team will be placed on the scene by helos on Sunday morning.

Enemy activity in the Delta is steadily increasing and squadron aircraft are receiving more return fire during the air strikes. On Friday, 19 December, alert crews from both detachments were scrambled to a location midway between the two bases. An ARVN unit had made contact with an estimated force of 300 that were being forced to move out into the open. It was an effective strike and the troops were observed to be uniformed and helmeted, undoubtedly NVA regulars. This was an unusually large force to encounter in the Delta warfare.

Another large group of VAL-4 officers and men will be returning home the first week in January and most of the remaining original squadron personnel will be rotated around the end of February. Most of the pilots have received orders to VS and VP units; only two have orders to VA (jet attack) although many requested attack squadrons.

This is indicative of the enigma the Navy forces face in categorizing the Navy Bronco squadron - apparently BuPers considers the multi-engine aspects as a primary factor. One young officer, LTJG Pete Dunn (aerospace engineering graduate) has received orders to NAVPRO Columbus and will arrive in Columbus sometime in March. He reported to VAL-4 from the Training Command about one year ago.

On 1 January 1970, VAL-4 Det Alpha at VNAF Binh Thuy will be integrated with the parent squadron. The Vung Tau detachment will still be known as Det Bravo.

Reported December 27, 1969

Since the loss of BUNO 155503 a week ago, it has been difficult to maintain the same degree of readiness with 12 aircraft to meet the over-increasing commitments the squadron has assumed over the past months. Although the original task force requirement was to maintain four ready aircraft at each of the two detachments, the squadron had been able to maintain a total of twelve armed and ready aircraft most of the time, even when the first of the original 14 aircraft was lost last July.

All missions are flown with two-plane elements (fire teams) and without a backup aircraft the mission must be scratched if one aircraft is not in ready status. If one aircraft is in NORS(G) status and another is down for maintenance (such as periodic inspection), this would leave five ready aircraft at each operating site, or two fire teams with one backup aircraft. Since two aircraft at each site are always in scramble alert status, this leaves two aircraft and a spare to accomplish 4 or 5 armed patrols per day. This demand is almost impossible to meet and the flight schedule will probably be improvised often until replacement aircraft are received.

BUNO 155394 is scheduled to arrive at Subic Bay on 14 January but no firm plans for transporting the aircraft to Cam Ranh Bay have yet been revealed. BuNo 155393, recently assigned to replace the last aircraft that was lost, will probably not arrive before the end of February. Consequently, operations will be a bit ragged for a few weeks and it may be a couple of months before the squadron is operating a full complement of aircraft. About this time the last of the original squadron personnel will be departing for home and another transition will take place as "new" personnel take over the key functions in the squadron.

As previously mentioned, the USAF FACs in IV Corps (22nd TASS) were directed to cease controlling and directing Navy Bronco air strikes last September. The airborne FACs are probably the better units for locating targets and the effect has been to deny the Navy squadron some of the more lucrative targets. This situation was recently changed by a directive from 7th Air Force. The USAF FACs are now permitted to call the "Black Ponies" for air support and to direct their strikes under certain ground rules. Basically, the limitations require that the FAC calls for TAC Air first and he can not ask to scramble the "pony" alert teams, i.e., if a Navy Bronco patrol is airborne it may be diverted to support the FAC and in most cases will arrive over the target long before the TAC Air unit is on the scene. This type of coordination is expected to produce some good results.

I attended a USAF/Navy meeting where this matter and the rules of engagement were discussed and overheard a humorous comment that is worthy of repeating. Only one of the USAF pilots attending the meeting had been around long enough to have worked with the "Black Ponies" last summer. When asked for his comments relating to past experience he indicated that working with the Broncos was ideal except for one very frustrating aspect; the Bronco out turns the Cessna O-2 and flies a tighter attack pattern than the O-2 can maintain, forcing the FAC to move his pattern off to the side of the target in order to keep both aircraft in sight all the time.

Reported January 10, 1970

In addition to a couple of U.S. congressmen and the Navy Chief of Chaplains, distinguished visitors in the past ten days included RADM W. T. Rapp, COMPATFOR 7th Fleet, and RADM C. S. Minter, COMPATFOR WESTPAC. Both

commands involve multi-engine patrol forces in the Western Pacific. The VAL-4 CO and XO flew both admirals on a strike mission and they were visibly impressed (in fact, exuberant) by the performance of the airplane and ordnance effects.

One aircraft (BUNO 155496) was struck on the underside of the cargo bay by two small fragments, probably the result of its own rocket fragments, but it was classified as combat damage.

Reported January 17, 1970

The night patrols have encountered few significant engagements for the last couple of weeks but the "Black Ponies" were quite active Saturday night, 17 January. Intelligence reports have been predicting a major offensive at one of several points in the Delta for several weeks and apparently a massive infiltration attempt across the border and Vinh Te Canal south of Chau Doc was made Saturday night. There were times when several boat units and outposts were in contact or under attack at the same time, so that it was necessary to direct the airborne fire teams on a priority basis. Aircraft from both Vung Tau and Binh Thuy were concentrated in the area.

In most cases the aircraft delivered all ordnance shortly after arriving in the target area and immediately returned to base to rearm until the operation dwindled to a standstill before dawn on Sunday. Full results of the operation will probably never be known since ground sweeps are not normally made in some of the areas involved.

After a series of messages it has been determined that the two replacement aircraft (BUNOS 155393 and 155394) are en route on the same ship. They are to be off-loaded at Vung Tau sometime in early February.

It is rumored that the Vung Tau Army Air Base where the VAL-4 Det Bravo is located will close in a few months and that the detachment will be moved to the Binh Thuy VNAF Base (squadron headquarters still remaining at Navy Binh Thuy) where the entire squadron will operate from one base. It is a credible rumor as rumors go.

Construction of the Navy facilities at the Binh Thuy VNAF Base is under way (the squadron has been operating from borrowed USAF spaces) and should be complete in June. The facilities were designed for ten aircraft but squeezing in four more is a minor problem. Construction of the Navy facilities at Binh Thuy was not coordinated with anticipated eviction from Vung Tau, it was just good fortune.

Reported January 24, 1970

Mr. J. Grimes, Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy for Vietnamization, visited NSA Binh Thuy this week but spent only a few moments around the helo and Bronco display aircraft. The VAL-4 squadron commander and executive officer flew VADM Zumwalt, COMNAVFORV, and BGEN Roberts, TAC AIR Commander, 7th Air Force, on a strike mission on Wednesday. It is understood that the purpose of the flight was to provide the general an opportunity to compare the OV-10A with the A-37B aircraft in their capability to perform the Navy missions.

Reported June 17, 1970

Information concerning the loss of OV-10A BuNO 155495 was received from VAL-4 commanding officer at Binh Thuy. The Navy aircraft was shot down somewhere in the Mekong Delta on 7 June 1970, resulting in fatal injuries to LT James Barton. The second pilot, LTJG Hanks, survived with minor injuries.

The aircraft was attacking a target defended by .30 and .51 caliber machine guns when it was hit in the left wing/nacelle area. The pilot in the front cockpit was apparently struck by the ground fire and the aircraft was on fire. The pilot in the rear cockpit repeatedly urged the other pilot to initiate ejection but received only a few unrelated words over the ICS. As the rear seat pilot prepared to eject himself, both ejection seats were fired, evidently initiated by the wounded pilot in the front cockpit. The ejections occurred at about 400 feet MSL.

The two escape systems functioned normally with both parachutes fully inflated prior to ground contact. However the wounded pilot was apparently unconscious since he remained prone and made no effort to release his parachute after landing. It is understood that this pilot sustained further injuries during subsequent helo rescue operations that may have precluded any chance for survival.

Enemy air defensive tactics during the past few weeks have changed in that anti-aircraft ground fire has increased sharply and with more heavy caliber weapons. Air strike tactics are being revised to compensate for the new aggressiveness of the enemy gunners. Concern is primarily for helos, FAC, and OV-10 aircraft that frequently fly at low altitudes.

Reported June 29, 1970

A visit to VAL-4 at Binh Thuy has produced more details concerning the combat loss of BUNO 155495. The names are corrected to LCDR G. Barton and LCDR James Hanks. The surviving pilot was LCDR Hanks who provided much of the information.

The aircraft was hit in the left engine by .30 caliber machinegun fire which failed the engine and caused a fire in the nacelle and adjacent

wing areas on both sides. Jagged holes in the engine cowling suggested that blades had separated from the engine turbine. The aircraft was under fire from a number of machinegun sites and was hit at about 1200 feet during a target run, the seventh or eighth run on the same target.

Gross weight of the aircraft at the time it was hit is estimated at slightly less than 13,000 pounds. The aircraft had taken off from Binh Thuy, directed to a target 28 miles northwest near Sa Dec, with a full load of internal fuel and 3300 pounds of ordnance (a MK4 gun pod and 12 Zuni rockets). Consequently the aircraft could not maintain altitude after recovering from the dive and directional control was marginal. Ejection was initiated from the front cockpit at about 400 feet over the terrain and 100 KIAS.

Reported July 2, 1970

Status of OV-10A aircraft assigned to VAL-4 in Vietnam is as follows:

BUNO 155495 (Strike)	BUNO 155475
155461	155394
155496	155491
155463	155493
155497	155494
155471	155480
155472	155474
	155458 (first flight on 22 June after delivery from VM0-6)

Reported August 14, 1970

Status of the OV-10A aircraft assigned to VS-41 based at NAS North Island, San Diego, is as follows:

BUNO 155460 (Strike)	BUNO 155470
155462	155473

Reported September 5, 1970

LCDR Burton, scheduled to report to VAL-4 as the Executive Officer, will also be trained during this period of relaxed OV-10A operations. CMDR L. M. Rausch, Executive Officer, was promoted to skipper of VAL-4.