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Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club: U.S. Carrier Operations off Vietnam

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I suspect that if this is a representative sample of what they publish, I never will again.

Mr. Liston would have us believe that the National Security Agency—which he maintains really controls this country through the manipulation of information—put a trick code machine on board the *Pueblo* and then arranged for the machine's capture. Their purpose, he says, was to defeat the North Vietnamese by breaking their codes when they started using the doctored machine. He would also have us believe that the *Pueblo's* crew was held incommunicado by the National Security Agency until they all agreed to tell the world that the Koreans had seized the ship and not to mention the Sino-Soviet confrontation or their participation in the seizure. His story begins with the crew members' accounts of the *Pueblo's* capture, and then tries to illustrate how they contradict each other. In fact, many of the "contradictions" can easily be explained by the various positions of the viewers and time of the report. A classic example of that is Liston's concern with the "conflicting" stories of the boarding. One man related that the captors approached from the port quarter, another reported that they came from astern and a third that they tied up to the starboard quarter. He offers this as evidence of doctored accounts of the seizure. However, anyone who has been to sea can easily imagine that all three accounts could be accurate. Ships do maneuver and relative position can change very quickly. Liston also reports that

there is a *Soviet* submarine base in Yonghung Bay, just north of Wonsan: something I am sure U.S. intelligence will be surprised to know. The author also states that the Japanese have no destroyer-sized warships. The editor of *Jane's Fighting Ships* will be distressed to learn this, because for many years he has been reporting that the Japanese do have such ships.

Liston may well be the victim of tall tales. There is internal evidence in the book that someone who was tangentially aware of the cryptologic technician's work in the USS *Jamestown* off Vietnam in the mid-1960s has filled Mr. Liston full of the kind of stories that CTs like to tell ship's clerks and boatswain mates.

Unless you are looking for a laugh, do not waste your time reading this book.

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Francillon, Rene J. *Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club: U.S. Carrier Operations off Vietnam*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 214pp. \$24.59

Everyone who was on a carrier operating off Yankee Point and vicinity during the Vietnam War should have a copy of this book. It names every participating carrier, lists every deployment and, above all, specifies the squadrons, their aircraft type and their flyers. To his surprise, the reviewer discovered the

name of a former neighbor who was shot down, rescued, then, in turn, shot down a MiG 21. If you know of someone who downed a MiG, who was shot down or taken prisoner, you will find his name in this book.

Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club opens with a summary of the status of carrier aviation into the early sixties. The main narrative, covering the carrier operations, is well-illustrated with photographs and describes the numerous and changing political restrictions placed on military targets that could be attacked. A 26-page monograph on the *Coral Sea* (CVA-43) primarily focuses on her seven Vietnam cruises. The author is openly partial to this old ship: she spent more time on the line (875 days) than any other carrier. Similar statistics are available for all 21 carriers which were part of Task Force 77 at various times during the ten-year conflict.

Appendix I is an alphabetical summary, by carrier, of their Vietnam cruises. There are line drawings of each carrier, photographs, and plenty of operational statistics. Appendix II addresses the aircraft of Task Force 77 by type, squadron, tail letters and 100 series number. The index includes a glossary and abbreviations.

The book emphasizes that ground fire downed significantly more U.S. carrier aircraft than air combat (436 lost to AA fire, 91 to SAMs and 15 to MiGs). U.S. carrier forces shot down 62 enemy aircraft, all by missiles, none by cannon alone. Due to security restrictions, the author

admittedly uses incomplete statistics to show relative aircraft survivability as a function of days on the line, an imperfect measure. In this light, the F-4 and F-8 come out best, the A-1 and A-4 the worst.

One concern is that available statistics emphasize the negative—aircraft and personnel losses, ship casualties, extended time on station—without comparable detailed information on the positive: strike planning, fleet objectives and so on. More data on the degree of mission success from the standpoint of TF-77 would have been helpful, along with details obtained from those higher up the chain of command than squadron commanders. (Some of this information is still classified and some remains the exclusive property of North Vietnam).

Over the long period of the Vietnam conflict the Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club acquired many members. The author says: “. . . for most of the war, targets assigned to Naval Aviators and their Air Force brethren were seldom worth the price paid in terms of ordnance expended and aircraft lost. The human toll was even more tragic.”

Francillon has accomplished an impressive piece of research. He presents a tremendous amount of interrelated information data in very few pages.

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