



The Day Book

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A Newsletter for the Supporters of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

On the Firing Line

USS *America* in the Vietnam War

by Shayne Whiting

The Vietnam War had profound effect on the lives of every American citizen. Even though the war was fought in a country located halfway around the globe, the fighting was still able to reach into the hearts and minds of people back in this country. One might think that the Hampton Roads area would be exempt from a Pacific conflict, but unfortunately we were not.

On April 10, 1968, one of the U.S. Navy's most modern ships left Norfolk, bound for a tour in the Pacific Ocean. Measuring more than 1,100 feet in length and kept over 5,000 crew members, the 70,000-ton aircraft carrier USS *America* passed over the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel on its way to the Gulf of Tonkin. On this tour to join the struggle in Vietnam, *America* carried with it some of the Navy's newest weapons to the battlefield including the latest version of the F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber, the A-6 Intruder bomber and the latest in anti-radar missiles, the "Shrike."

By the end of May 1968, *America* had arrived on "Yankee Station," the U.S. Navy's staging area for launching strikes against the communists. *America*, along with other Navy aircraft carriers, had the responsibility of interdicting North Vietnamese Army (NVA)



Pictured here is the USS *America* (CVA-66) as it looked during the Vietnam War. *America* made three tours to the U.S. Navy's "Yankee Station" in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. This assignment was also humorously called the "Gulf of Tonkin Yacht Club." (U.S. Navy Photo)

supply routes. The carriers launched several hundred sorties in an attempt to slow down the efforts of the NVA in supplying their units to the south. The main supply route was called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This route was a system of roads and trails that allowed the NVA to circumvent enemy ground forces by travelling through Laos and Cambodia. The route was a frequent target of American bombers.

One sortie was particularly eventful. NVA surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) shot down a F-4J piloted by Lt. Cmdr. J.W. Holtzclaw and Lt. Cmdr. J.A. Burns of Squadron VF-33. The two men both parachuted safely and hid out in dense terrain in hopes of being rescued. Under the cover of night, Lt. Clyde Lassen and his Seasprite helicopter crew from the destroyer USS *Preble* (DLG-15) picked up the two pilots while under heavy fire from the enemy. President Johnson later awarded Lt. Lassen the Medal of Honor for this heroic act.

America returned to the front line in 1970. The 1970 cruise to the Gulf of Tonkin was similar to the 1968 cruise in that *America's* mission was to attack targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. *America* targeted not

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“Up Periscope” on a New Exhibit


The Director’s Column

by Becky Poulliot

The museum’s newest exhibit is now on-line, literally. A new exhibit kiosk in the modern Navy section of our gallery is home to “Submarine Force: Past, Present and Future.” This interactive, touch-screen program uses a computer and CD-ROM to guide the visitor through the past, present and future of the Navy’s submarines. The program came from the Naval Submarine On-Board Training Command in Groton, Connecticut. It should prove to be one of the most educational and fun exhibits in the museum.

In this issue of *The DayBook*, we turn our attention to the Vietnam War. One of the museum’s largest artifacts is the model of the Norfolk-based aircraft carrier USS *America*. The actual carrier made three tours to the famous Navy post “Yankee Station” off the coast of Vietnam. Our feature docent for this issue is **John Simanton** who was a witness to the tragic end of the Vietnam War while stationed off the coast of Vietnam in 1975.

Speaking of the volunteers, we are sad to see our Volunteer Coordinator **Jamie Swanson** leave us. Jamie’s hard work and enthusiasm will be missed by all. While the museum looks at ways to fill Jamie’s position, EMCS (SS) **Brian “Mac” McMurtrie** has joined the museum staff on a part-time, temporary basis. Senior Chief Mac has spent more than 20 years working with nuclear reactors onboard submarines and aircraft carriers. We are pleased to have him with us here at the museum.

One last note. This issue is the concluding one on the first year of publication for *The DayBook*. Congratulations to **Gordon Calhoun**, our editor, for establishing an informative and an interesting forum for our community of naval enthusiasts. 

Last Call in Vietnam

by Bob Matteson

In 1974, Richard Nixon was President, most of the troops in Vietnam had come home and, for the most part, priorities on college campuses had shifted away from the war. There were some hold outs on issues and some students still wore long hair and grew beards; but they were not necessarily latent hippies. More often than not they were young people who had entered college or the work force on the tail end of the peace movement and had not found what they wanted in life.

That August, a young, bearded, long-haired graduate from Illinois College was on his way to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center for “boot camp.” Museum docent **John Simanton** enlisted in the Navy with a guarantee to go to the “A” school to become an operations specialist. After finishing as battalion honor man in boot camp and first in his class at “A” school, he was given his pick of orders in March 1975. Simanton, who wanted to get away from Illinois and see the world, selected USS *Worden* (DLG-18) which was currently a part of USS *Midway*’s battlegroup. He arrived on the *Worden* while it was enroute to Sattahipp, Thailand.

Simanton was a sailor with a “gung-ho” personality. He was thrilled to finally have the chance to work in the combat information center (CIC) of a missile frigate. No sooner had he settled in as a member of the crew, when it became apparent that Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, was going to fall to advancing communist forces. Within a few hours, the Navy ordered the *Worden* to sail for the South China Sea to assist in evacuating Saigon as a part of Operation *Frequent Wind*.

The *Worden* arrived on station the next day and joined up with the carriers *Midway* (CVA-41), *Coral Sea* (CVA-43) and *Hancock* (CV-9). As the operation progressed, the ships were stationed in operational geographic sectors offshore in the vicinity of Saigon. “The *Worden* provided early warning air control radar surveillance for friendly and hostile aircraft identification and control. My job as operator on a secure radio circuit, called Navy Red,

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About *The Day Book*

The Day Book is an authorized publication of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum (HRNM). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official view of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Marine Corps and do not imply endorsement thereof. The HRNM is a museum dedicated to the study of 200 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. in September and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. starting October 1.

The Day Book’s purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum related events. It is written by the staff and volunteers of the museum. The newsletter takes its name from a 19th century Norfolk newspaper.

Questions or comments can be directed to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum editor. *The Day Book* can be reached at 444-8971, by fax at 445-1867, or write *The Day Book*, Hampton Roads Naval Museum, One Waterside Drive, Suite 248, Norfolk, VA 23510-1607. *The Day Book* is published bi-monthly with a circulation of 1000.

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The Grandest of Them All

The Original Builder's Model of U.S. Navy's 66th Aircraft Carrier, USS *America*
by Joe Judge

Look at the aircraft carrier!" Since the Hampton Roads Naval Museum opened in 1979, visitors have rushed to the case holding the model of USS *America* (CV-66). The excitement of an aircraft carrier has something to do with this reaction. These gigantic ships always draw attention when they are featured in museum exhibits or news articles.

The model itself also is responsible for the typically enthusiastic visitor response. It is the largest model in the museum, with an impressive length of over 12 feet. This length reflects a scale of 1/8"=1', that is every eighth of an inch on the model represents 1 foot on the actual ship. Visitors find looking at the model especially fun due to its large size.

The model of the *America* is significant for other reasons besides its size and the history of the ship, as interesting and important as these are. The model is a builder's model, which means that it was created by the company that also built the real ship. In the case of the *America*, the company was Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co. Naval architects at this famous shipyard made a "drawing room" waterline model of the carrier, which was used to design the ship. The shipyard's preeminent model maker, Robert Fee, converted this model to the full exhibition model that the museum now features today. The finished model was delivered to the Navy on December 21, 1965, about eleven months after the real carrier *America* was commissioned.

Originally, builder's models were used as guides to settle questions about construction details for ships. This process is sometimes called "measuring and debating." The term "drawing room" model was used because these models very often sat in drafting rooms. The advent of computers with very exacting design capabilities has made these role builder's models obsolete as design tools, however they are still made for other reasons. Today they serve an important public relations role. By being on exhibit, visitors can learn about Naval vessels, and taxpayers can see what their hard-earned dollars have purchased.


In addition to the model of the carrier, a carrier air wing from the Vietnam War timeframe was also constructed. Among the aircraft are the F-4 Phantom, the Navy's principal fighter; the A-4 Skyhawk, A-6 Intruder and A-7 Corsair II, which made up the air wing's bombers; the RA-5 Vigilante, which was used for pre- and post-strike photo

reconnaissance; the C-2 Greyhound, which was used to transport passengers and cargo to the carrier and finally the KA-3 Skywarrior, called "the Whale" by Navy pilots due to its difficult handling,



Shown here is the original builder's model of the aircraft carrier USS *America* (CV-66). The model itself is over 12 feet in length and is the largest model in the museum's collection. The aircraft displayed are types used during the Vietnam War. (HRNM photo)

which was used for in-flight refueling.

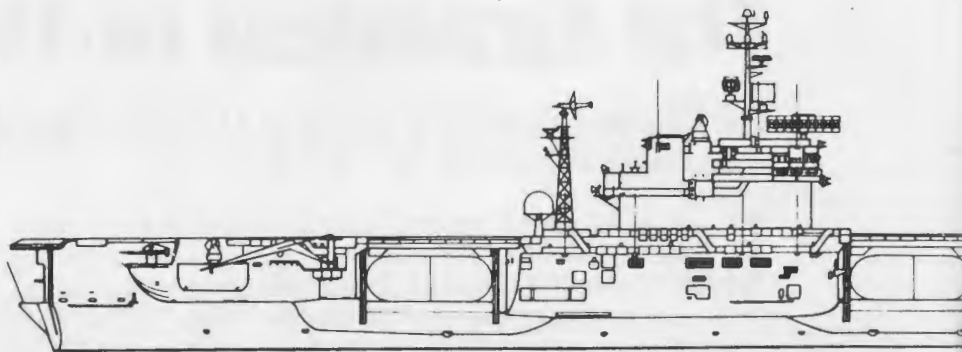
The *America* is one of the many models the museum has borrowed from the Naval Sea System Command's Curator of Models, located at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Carderock, Maryland. This office serves as the Navy's center for preservation, research and maintenance of the Navy's growing collection of models. 

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only North Vietnam, but also Laos and Cambodia as well. The Navy deployed its latest version of the A-7 Corsair II, which had an improved fire control radar that allowed the jet to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail at night.

Results of the 1968 and 1970 bombings of the Ho Chi Minh Trail by *America's* and other U.S. bombers are very difficult to gauge. The NVA shipped the supplies by rather primitive methods. That is, they mainly shipped the supplies by foot and bicycle and not so much by trucks. Additionally, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was not just one route, but rather a complex system of several roads and trails making it difficult to find and target the supply convoys. As a result of the problems, U.S. pilots had a frustrating time in achieving their objectives.

The most important of the three deployments occurred in 1972. By then, most American forces had withdrawn from South Vietnam. Since the American military presence had dropped off, North Vietnam attempted to take advantage of the situation both militarily and politically. Militarily, the NVA launched an all-out ground offensive during the Easter holiday. On the political front, Hanoi broke off peace talks with the United States in Paris. The United States could only respond with air



A flight deck crew member attaches an A-7 Corsair II to the catapult in preparation for a strike against North Vietnam in 1970. (U.S. Navy photo. Provided by RADM Thomas Russell (Ret).)



*Off to war—Shown here is the *America* leaving Hampton Roads when it began a six month cruise around the world in 1970. It arrived at Yankee Station off Vietnam in August and returned home to Norfolk in December. (U.S. Navy photo. Photo provided by RADM Thomas Russell (Ret).)*

power. Aircraft carriers and U.S. Air Force units were all that remained to assist the army of South Vietnam.

America participated in this response when it began its third and final cruise to Yankee Station on June 5. It arrived in mid-July, but combat operations had to be delayed when the main feed pump to one of *America's* boilers ruptured. This potentially devastating accident was contained, but the ship was forced to pull back to Subic Bay in the Philippines for repairs. *America* returned to the front on Aug. 25, and joined with five other carriers already on station, which included USS *Enterprise* (CVN-65), USS *Kitty Hawk* (CVA-63), USS *Midway* (CVA-41), USS *Oriskany* (CVA-34) and USS *Saratoga* (CV-60). The build-up of Naval units in the Gulf of Tonkin came in direct response to the events of the previous months and was entitled Operation *Linebacker*. *Linebacker* was a joint Navy/Air Force operation designed to stop North Vietnamese aggression once and for all, and bring the enemy back to the peace talk table. This operation was already in full swing, when *America* arrived from Norfolk. *Linebacker* differed from previous air campaigns. All restrictions on targets were lifted. Navy and Air Force pilots struck at any and all targets. Everything from oil tanks and shipyards to MiG airfields and NVA staging areas were struck.

Among the targets was an old nemesis of U.S. pilots. Ever since 1964, U.S. Navy and Air Force pilots had attempted to knock out the Than Hoa Bridge, also called by its French colonial name, the "Paul



Doumer.” The bridge carried military traffic across the Red River from Hanoi and was a main supply link to the south. Because of its importance, it was the most heavily defended area in North Vietnam. Using laser-guided ordnance, skill and sheer courage, pilots from *America* found their target and dropped the bridge Oct. 9.

Like previous cruises to Yankee Station, *America* brought a new tool to the fight. This time it was the EA-6 Prowler. The EA-6 was a modified A-6 Intruder equipped state-of-the-art electronic warfare (EW) equipment, used to confuse and jam enemy radar and SAM systems. The aircraft was very effective in shielding U.S. Air Force B-52 heavy

of the Than Hoa Bridge after eight years of Navy and Air Force attempts. Its fighters and bombers played an important role in bringing the enemy back to the negotiating table, and finally achieving a long-awaited cease-fire.

Even though the results of some of the sorties launched by *America* and other aircraft carriers are questionable, one can not fault the personnel themselves. The crew and pilots of these ships carried out their orders and job with the utmost professionalism and expertise, sometimes under very difficult circumstances. In the case of *America*, its crew had to spend Christmas 1972 in the Gulf of Tonkin rather than stateside.

By the time the war ended in 1975, *America* had already returned home to Hampton Roads. The carrier still serves the Navy today some thirty-four years after it was first laid down at Newport News Shipbuilding. 🚢



A flight deck crewman onboard *America* prepares to give the go ahead signal to a F-4J of squadron VF-92 in 1970. *America* was currently on its second tour in the Gulf of Tonkin during this time period. (U.S. Navy Photo. Provided by RADM Russell (Ret).)

bombers from enemy SAMs. Along with the EW aircraft, E-2B Hawkeye radar control aircraft assisted in early detection of enemy threats. F-4 Phantoms provided fighter escorts for the B-52s. *America*'s aircraft achieved their goals as the B-52s hit over 1,600 targets losing only 15 of their heavy bombers.

Linebacker succeeded as the North Vietnamese government quickly returned to the negotiating table in Jan. 1973. Hanoi soon agreed to a cease-fire agreement with the United States. Once the cease-fire accord was signed, all American combat operations came to a halt and most of the remaining forces withdrew home.

America compiled a noteworthy career in Vietnam. Its pilots were credited with two MiG kills in air-to-air combat and with the destruction



The Theatre of War-Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War

The editor would like to thank retired Navy Rear Adm. Thomas Russell, who was commanding officer of the USS *America* from 1970-72, and the public affairs office of the USS *America* for their assistance with this article.

Volunteer News & Notes

by EMCS (SS) Brian "Mac" McMurtrie

A SPECIAL THANKS

First off, I would like to thank all those involved with the Nauticus Volunteer Open House that took place July 26. It was a great evening and fun for all. I hope to get more volunteers to join the docent ranks with the new docent training class which begins Oct. 10.

Thank to all the docents for their help during my first two months on the job. A number of tours have been provided for various groups of visitors, always with good comments. We also received numerous positive comments from the great number of visitors through the museum. Congratulations to all, a job well done.

VOLUNTEER INTEREST

I would like to pass on some information. Several volunteers have requested documentation of their volunteer hours for tax purposes. This documentation may be used to file for travel expenses incurred for volunteer work. Be sure to check with your tax advisor or the IRS on this matter for details. Harold Jarashow was hospitalized, but has been

released, and Guy Beale had recent surgery. May our thoughts ensure quick recovery and good health.

DOCENT ACHEIVEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to the following docents who have achieved noteworthy volunteer hours. Ken Clineman, Bob Gladu and Mark Sanderson have reached 100 hours. Preston Turpin has reached 200 hours. Bob Comet is at 250 hours. Tom Duggan, John Simanton and Al Petrich have logged 300 hours. Peter Watson is at 400 hours, Ralph Preston is at 500 and Hunt Lewis has logged a staggering 600 hours. These numbers are as of the first week in August.

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required me to hold a handset to my ear for 12 hours a day writing down everything said. In terms of events of decisions, priority message traffic was given over to the secure circuits. It was very exciting. With my other ear, I could hear air controllers talking to (South Vietnamese) pilots whose nerves were extremely tight." One such dialogue that Simanton heard went like this:

Midway controller: "OK 14, I've got you on radar. Do you have me in sight?"



Pictured here is HRNM docent John Simanton's picture fresh from boot camp in 1975. He is now a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve. (Photo provided by John Simanton)

Pilot: "Roger-Oh! So many ships! Where are you?! Where are you?!"

Controller: "I am an aircraft carrier-do you know what an aircraft carrier is? Over."


Pilot: (quite frantic) "Roger."

Controller: "Follow a big flat deck with a big '41' on it. Do you see me, over?"

"Ultimately, the captain of the *Midway* had an inspiration. He told the engineer department to give all the smoke they could to assist the pilot in finding the ship. This was taboo, but it worked nicely," noted Simanton. Other planes that *Midway's* controllers brought safely down included an Army of the Republic of Vietnam major and his family who flew in an Army L-4 spotter aircraft and the helicopter that belonged to the vice-president of South Vietnam,

which had been stolen by another Republic of Vietnam officer.

The Vietnamese pilots were not the only ones with edgy nerves during this operation. At one point, general quarters was sounded onboard the *Worden* because an enemy radar emission had been picked up. It was thought to be a North Vietnamese patrol boat armed with Styx anti-ship missiles. Fortunately, it turned out to be a false alarm when it was discovered that the radar emissions were really coming from an American vessel and not a Vietnamese one.

Once the strenuous evacuation was over, the *Worden* departed for a much needed five-day liberty call in Hong Kong. On the third day of liberty, the Khmer Rouge seized the American freighter *Mayaguez*. "Our port visit was cut short and we headed to the scene of action off Cambodia. (We) served as a radar picket ship for the *Coral Sea* while she provided air support for the recapture of the ship and its crew," Simanton said. He added, "Things finally wound down and the *Worden* headed for her home port in Yokouska, Japan." 



No turning back now-In his own Army uniform, HRNM Education Specialist **Bob Matteson** swears in the museum's former volunteer coordinator **Jamie Swanson** into the U.S. Army. After boot camp at Ft. Jackson, S.C., Jamie will head to Officer's Candidate School at Ft. Benning, Georgia.

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WELCOME ABOARD

I would like to welcome aboard our newest volunteer, **Jenro Lambaiso**. He is currently the acting boatswain of the *American Rover*, the sailing tour ship which is anchored in Norfolk. His contribution to us is his years of Naval experience and his expertise in knot tying. He will perform knot tying demonstrations for the visitors on Tuesdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. He is enthusiastic about the upcoming docent training in October so he will be able to assist in tours.

JAMIE'S NEW ADDRESS

Jamie is now at boot camp in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. She wants *everyone* to write her. She can be reached at:

SPC Jamie D. Swanson
226-27-6120
D-4-13th Inf. BCT
Ft. Jackson, S.C. 29206

Calendar of Noteworthy Things

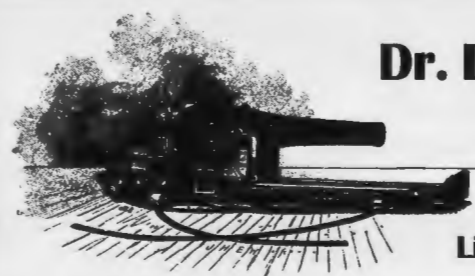
September

8, 1781 Battle off the Virginia Capes-Eighteen French ships-of-the-line under the command of Adm. Francois Joseph Paul Comte de Grasse repel a British squadron under the command of Adm. Thomas Graves off Cape Henry. The French victory at sea leads the British commander at Yorktown, Virginia, Lord Cornwallis to surrender to Gen. George Washington and Gen. Rochambeau.

13 Dr. Dean Allard, retired Director of Naval History, will speak on Naval technology used during the American Civil War. To be held in the Nauticus Living Sea Theatre at 7:00 p.m.

September Birthdays

Al Petrich John Roberts
 Wallace Smith
 Jack Walters
 Michael Yahia



Dr. Dean Allard

September 13
7:00 pm

Living Sea Theater

October

3 HRNM Docent Training Class begins-All persons interested in becoming museum docents should contact Bob Matteson at 444-8971, ext. 113 for more information on this class.

22, 1962 Quarantine of Cuba begins-The Norfolk-based ships USS *Essex* (CVS-9), USS *Newport News* (CA-148) and USS *Canberra* (CAG-2) and several destroyers begin a naval blockade of Cuba to stop the entry of Soviet weapons.

October Birthdays

Bob Deegan
 Patricia Respass
 Bob Tye
 Ken Wiley
 Craig Arnold
 Guy Beale Jr.
 Bob Comet
 Tom Duggan