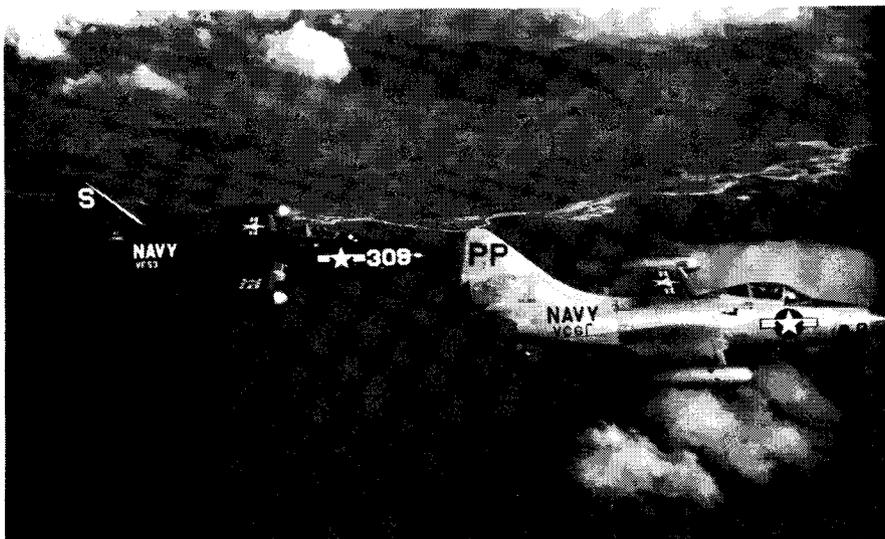


BLUE KNIGHTS MAKE THEIR MARK IN KOREA



HERE A BLUE KNIGHT OF F-53 ESCORTS A PHOTOPLANE OF VC-61 EN ROUTE TO NORTH KOREA

FIGHTER Squadron 53 has dubbed its pilots the *Blue Knights*. Certainly their role in the Twentieth Century is not unlike that played in the days of chivalry by knights of old. Riding rugged Grumman steeds and using 20 mm cannon for lances, the jet pilots go forth from their floating "castle" in defense of right.

In 1948, the squadron was organized as part of Air Group Five, famous in World War II, and given its place in the heirarchy of renowned squadrons. Christened VF-53, the squadron was outfitted with *Bearcats* and commanded by LCdr. W. D. Hubbell. He was succeeded in 1949 by LCdr. W. R. Pittman, and the squadron changed to *Corsairs*.

With the outbreak in Korea in 1950, the young squadron grew up fast. On a peace-time "show the flag" cruise in the Far East, the air group was ordered to Korea in June 1950. On 3 July, taking off from the deck of their carrier, the *Valley Forge*, VF-53 pilots began winning their spurs in Korean skies.

Shortly after the conflict opened, Ens. Hugh C. Kuhlman, air intelligence officer of the squadron found himself lecturing with a show of authority on a country he had never seen. He was trying to give the name of the North Korean capital. Pyongyang!

"Let's call it 'Ping-Pong Balls'", said one of the ensigns. Ping-Pong Balls it was from then on.

During the early days of the war, VF-53 pilots set records for destruction. Flying as a wingman, Ens. John Abbott destroyed nine locomotives in one day.

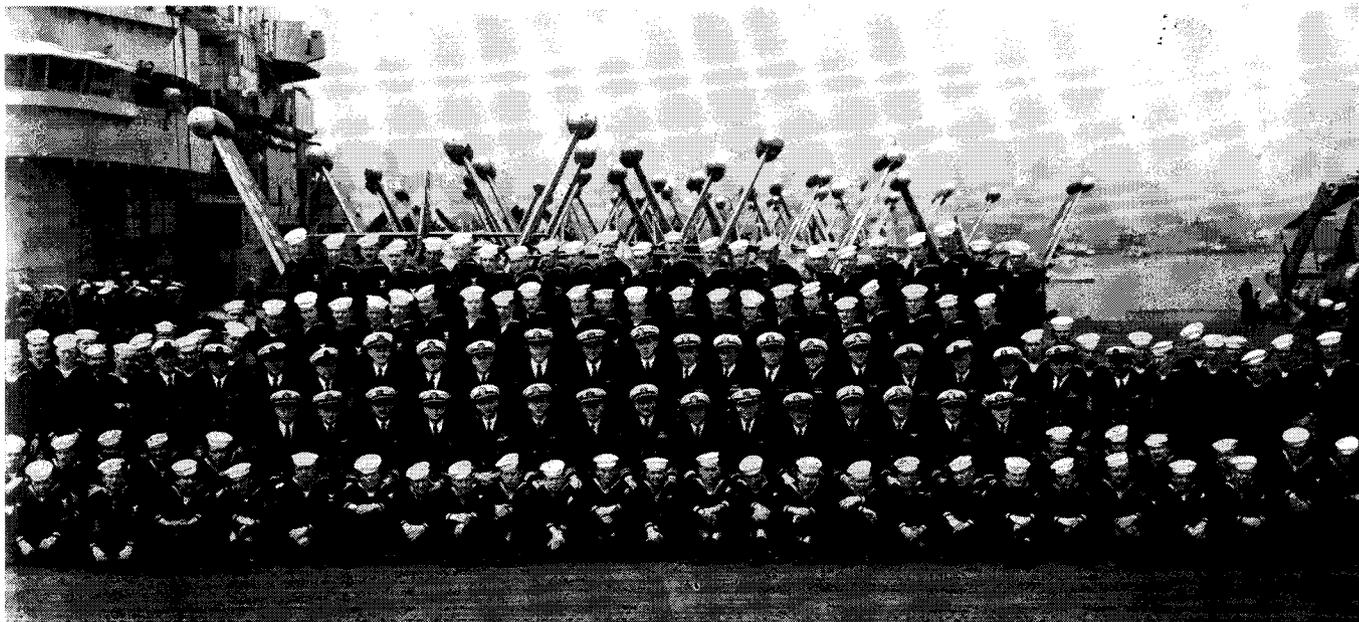
Another VF-53 ensign, Eldon W. Brown, Jr., set some kind of record when on September 15, 1950, he set off what looked like an atomic explosion. This happened when he hit a long line of boxes some seven feet high and three boxes wide near a machine gun emplacement. The peculiar orange flame of burning ammunition made him get out in a hurry.

"I grabbed the stick and throttle tightly, leveled mv wings and held on," Brown said. "Wham! The explosion was terrific. A big red cloud of dust mushroomed up past me, and by that time I was up to almost 4,000 feet."

Bridge-busting and rail cutting from Wonsan to the Yalu River, Air Group Five interrupted the flow of supplies and harassed the North Koreans. When the battle-worn heroes returned to San Diego in November 1950, the young squadron had become a veteran.

In June 1951, VF-53 set out again, this time aboard the USS *Essex* with VF-51, VF-54 and VF-172. Cdr. H. J. Trum III, led the *Corsairs* this trip for VF-53.

Early war success and experience were parlayed into outstanding results, more than proving the combat effectiveness of the old fighters. The squadron led the Pacific Fleet in aircraft availability. Lts. Pat Working, Tom Vaught, Lts. (jg)



THESE 26 OFFICERS AND 122 ENLISTED MEN ARE BLUE KNIGHTS OF FIGHTER SQUADRON FIVE, AN OUTFIT THAT HAS HAD THREE COMBAT TOURS



SIX PILOTS PLAN THE DETAILS OF THE FOLLOWING DAY'S MISSION



CDR. TRUM, EX-SKIPPER, CDR. GREEN AND LCDR. MULLIGAN ON VALLEY

"Rube" Prichard, Jim Foster, Sam Chessman and Dick Walter now flying *Panthers* with the *Blue Knights*, were then first-tour pilots in *Corsairs*, contributing to the mounting combat record begun in 1950 by the squadron. Eighteen DFC's, 49 Air Medals and eight citations were recommended for VF-53 on its second Korean cruise.

Returning to San Diego, Cdr. Trum was relieved in April, 1952 by LCDr. Lawrence B. Green at NAS SAN DIEGO. Again the squadron was faced with reorganization and training, but it came through with flying colors. Transition to Grumman *Panthers* meant a complete retraining of maintenance crews, prop specialists of two combat cruises; only one pilot had over 25 jet hours.

Six and seven-day weeks became the rule, as well as days of 0500 FCLP to 2200 night flying. Maintenance crews worked long and hard to provide planes to qualify all pilots. Morale grew rapidly. Grips were few. All hands dug in.

A SECOND transition became necessary, though much smoother, to F9F-5's. Most of September and October were spent in the hot desert shooting 20 mm's, firing HVAR's, and dropping practice bombs, as well as simulating close air support in the Carrizo Impact Area. The ordnance crew proved its worth as the squadron worked an 0200-2200 day in two shifts. All pilots qualified in bombing, rockets, and strafing. LCDr. Charles Mulligan's division came up with scores packing the most punch, though all pilots felt more than ready for Korea.

Following a short period of day and night FCLP, carquals were successfully completed without incident on the *Valley Forge*. Skipper "Larry" Green became the first *Blue Knight* to make a jet carrier landing. In fact, since assuming command, the skipper has been first and usually tops in each aspect of training—this leadership didn't change in Korea either when the chips were really down.

Of the final 10 weeks before deployment, the squadron spent five of them away from their homes, friends and families, but however discouraging, this situation knitted the squadron together. On bidding San Diego farewell on 20 November, 1952, VF-53 was ready for the job ahead. Precision and teamwork had been achieved.

The squadron was welcomed aboard the *Happy Valley* by several former teammates now serving with ship's company. The executive officer, Cdr. Frederick Bakutis, was the air group commander in 1948 and 1949. Cdr. Trum, who led the squadron on the previous cruise, was now the "air boss". Directing operations from primary fly, he shows definite pride as his old squadron continues in the tradition he moulded.

LCdr. Peterson, LSO for the air group in 1948 and 1949, was now aircraft handling officer, and even the squadron's executive officer, LCDr. "Chuck" Mulligan had served a tour of duty previously in the same air group. With such "alum-

ni" aboard, the ship-air group relations couldn't be anything but good.

Through mid-May, the *Blue Knights* had 1,266 combat sorties to their credit.

Coordination with the props of VF-54 and VF-92 has proved highly successful on heavy-flak targets. In fact, a flight led by Skipper Green successfully silenced 38 gun positions which were throwing intense flak into a prop strike on an electrical power station at Tanchon, and assisted in its destruction. Photo escorts for VC-61 jet photo planes break up the "bomb, rocket and strafe" routine, and, of course, the ever-present jet combat air patrols guards Task Force 77.

So, with their rugged Grumman war horses, 20 mm lances, and carrier castle, the pilots and men of Fighting Fifty-Three are appropriately dubbed *Blue Knights*.

Backed by a strong spirit of unity and "can do . . . will do," the squadron is living up to its name. Now once more stateside, the *Blue Knights* are looking forward to flying the newest Navy jets.



LT. DICK GRAHAM BRIEFES HARDY (SEATED), FROSIO, AND SERVICE ON KOREAN COMBAT MISSION