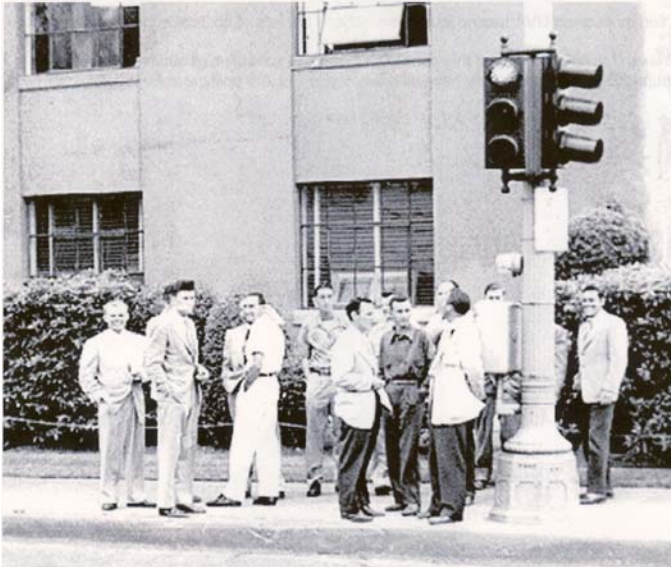


FIGHTER SQUADRON VF-781 Is Recalled for the Korean War



Collin got this many San Diego pilots together at 11th Naval District (foot of Broadway in San Diego) to get our views on volunteering for Korea. Identified from left: Bob Fleming, Vern Pepper, Monty Monteau, Homer Davis, Burr Williams, Bob Scully, Glenn Edwards. (photo from Monteau)

On June 25th 1950, North Korea invaded the South. On July 25th 1950, VF-781 was recalled from NAS Los Alamitos, California. Here are some of their stories:

Gene Kyle, LT VF-781, 3-05-88

I joined the active reserve in 1946. We reported to the North Island Naval Air Station and flew every other week. Our squadron was VF-54L. There was also a VF-55L at North Island. The Navy decided to move the Fighter Squadrons out of North Island to Los Alamitos. The two squadrons became VF-781. At that time we started flying just once a month for a two day weekend.

VF-781 had their two week active duty tour in early June 1950. We were an active squadron and liked to party. Our motto was "FUMID" (Eff You Mack, I'm Detached). We were restricted from using the 'O' Club by the Station Executive Officer. He made a statement to the effect, "You guys think you are so good. Just you wait - some day there will be an Emergency and you will be the first Squadron on this base to be recalled to Active Duty." An Emergency did arrive shortly after that. It was good politics to Volunteer and stay together. The Exec told me: "volunteer or not, you are going to be back on active duty."

William "Bill" Byron, LT VF-783

Joined the NAS Los Alamitos in September 1947. Assigned to VF-54L, Colin Oveland, C. O. In the fall of 1949 I was assigned to fly one hop with the skipper. After that flight I was informed by C.O. that the Naval Reserve was undergoing a reorganization and that VF-54L would become VF-781 in December 1949 and I would be transferred to VF-783.

As a member of VF-783 I flew cross-countries from Los Alamitos to Seattle & return and again from Los Alamitos to San Antonio & return, all from December 1949 to June 1950, for a total of 48 hours. In June 1950 my C.O., Joe Anthony, informed me that this would be my last drill. There would not be a billet for me at Los Alamitos. Later, after the Korean War started I was invited by C.O. Oveland to attend a group meeting of Los Alamitos aviators where we were encouraged to volunteer to return to active duty to fight in Korea. This I did not do but later I received a telegram that I was being recalled with

VF-783. VF-781 was recalled since they volunteered but I was told that VF-783 was recalled because they were better prepared than any other Fighter Squadron at Los Alamitos. I often wonder how that unusually high 48 hours I flew with VF-783 between December 1949 and June 1950 contributed to VF-783 being recalled for the Korean War.

I flew combat at Okinawa & Korea, awarded DFC, 9 Air Medals, Navy Commendation medal (with Combat V), Presidential Unit Citation and Navy Unit Citation. In both Okinawa & Korea I flew aircraft that was struck by AA fire. At Okinawa my carrier, USS *Sangamo*, (CVE-26) was struck by a Kamikaze.

I was on active duty for over 5 years and a part of the Naval Reserve program for over 20 years. Graduated with a B.S. degree in Public Administration from U.S.C. in 1950. Employed over 30 years by Los Angeles Police Department, retiring June '72 with the rank of Captain of Police.

Homer B. Davis, LT VF-781

Prior to the Korean war I was a part time student at SDSU and a member of the Naval Air Reserve at Los Alamitos in VF-781. War broke out in June of 1950 I called Burr Williams and suggested we volunteer as a unit. He thought it a great idea and called Collie. The rest is history that we are trying to document.

Dick Horst, VF-781, at the 50th Reunion

I joined the Navy Reserve in March 1947, went to a few meetings and decided it wasn't for me. Then in October 1948, I enlisted in a program for 18 year olds, one year active duty then 4 years in the active reserve or 6 years as an inactive reservist. I chose the inactive reserve till informed it was the active reserve or back to the regular Navy. After some 5 months in a TBM squadron at Los Alamitos, I was called back for the Korean War. I was one of 4 from that reserve squadron that were called to active duty. So on October 4, 1950, I'm back in the Navy. Four days at Los Alamitos spreading the base sewerage plant product on the under construction base golf course. Did not sit well with me or those others recently called up but that's the Navy. All the work was done in undress blues, not dungarees.

Then on to Treasure Island, San Francisco, for assignment. Having set a record for avoiding work parties, I was assigned to VF-781 about November 4 or so.

VF-781 was in El Centro when I joined them. One of the pilots – [Bill] Piscopo – was killed the week before I arrived. I was put on the night crew with the electrician from an F8F Bearcat squadron on previous active duty. As you know, 781 was flying F4U Corsairs at that time.

The enlisted men of 781 in November 1950 consisted of several types, groups:

1st Group: The men who were with the squadron before they were activated. This included some eight 17 year olds who volunteered in July 1950 before starting their senior year in high school. There were about 6 CPOs who had been with the 781 before activation. Then maybe 25 - 35 other enlisted men of various rates: 3rd, 2nd and 1st class

petty officers who had also been activated with the squadron. Most of these were mechanics, ordinance or sheet metal rates.

2nd Group: A number of 15 - 20 were assigned right out of boot camp. These were all regular Navy. Most had signed up for 3 years but with the Korean War, a year was added.

3rd Group: Those who had served in WW II signed on with the inactive reserve, forgot the Navy, then in Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. 1950 got telegrams calling them back to active duty. A few like myself who served between 1946 and 1949 were then called back.

4th Group: Transfers from other regular Navy outfits. This included some CPOs and airmen. The first few months some of these enlisted men were not happy about their transfer to a reserve squadron. In time these feelings dissipated, for the most part.

All in all this was a very competent group which improved as the months went by. I know you'd like to hear every story – there are hundreds – maybe later. But first, Nicknames: Rags, Nightoff, Kinky, Snaggle Tooth, Sorrowful, Ace, Killer, Qbomb, Chief Pontiac, Gum Shoe, V.D., Twinky, Hog Jowls, Fearless Gorilla. I don't remember them all.

Donald V. Shafer, LT VF-781 Maintenance Officer

I had just joined VF-781 three months before recall to active duty and at that time my orders to join had not cleared the Navy Department. I was on my way home from work and heard on the radio that the squadron had volunteered 100% to return to active duty. In time I found that what I'd heard was true. Since I had had so much civilian experience in testing fixed wing aircraft and helicopters I was promoted to lieutenant.

As the squadron was being organized at NAS San Diego my duties were to assist the existing aircraft maintenance department to maintain the F4Us until the jets arrived. I also had additional temporary duty at Pratt and Whitney to learn the function and the maintenance of the J-42 jet engine used on the F9F-2 Fighter aircraft.

Bill Stames, LCDR VF-781 Executive Officer

In October of 1945 was detached [from the Navy]. I returned to Imperial Valley and founded my own soft drink bottling works and acquired two beverage franchises, Orange Crush and Grapette as well as my own brand of soft beverages.

I soon got itchy about flying again so I started my travels to Los Alamitos and joined up with [VF] 54L and from there and word came that South Korea had been invaded by North Korea. Well you know the rest, we were eventually recalled. I sold my business and away we went. We were assigned F9F-2Bs Panther jets. We named the squadron the " World Famous Pacemakers." We were directed to check out and qualify aboard within 90 days, which of course we did. We were ordered to Airgroup 102 commanded by Cdr. Harold (Hal) Funk and assigned to the Bon Homme Richard CV-31. We left in early May of 1951 and steamed out to Barbers Point for our ORI. And, straight out to the combat Zone in Korean Waters. We relieved the Valley Forge and started operations that same day.

Fighter Squadron VF-781
Is Recalled for the Korean War

-☆☆☆-