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USS PRINCETON *Newsletter*
P.O. Box 19449
San Diego, CA 92119

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For the Editor,

A friend of mine, Capt. Al Yesensky, USN ret., Coronado Cays, sent me a copy of the referenced newsletter wherein the MiG Shoot Down in '52 article appeared.

There are a number of versions of that article in print, most constructed from bits of information that floated about following the incident. Your version is quite unique, and like the others has morsels of fact and quite a lot of fiction. The true story has never been completely revealed. My version is based on my involvement. My claim of 3 Migs shot down by me is absolutely based on a personal appearance before VADM Briscoe just days after the encounter. The reason for so much secrecy at the time was that we knew the Migs were Soviet, and the reasons we knew it. The only data made public pretty much came from the USS Oriskany's log.

I served on the Princeton in fighter squadrons there in 1946, 47, 48 and 49 flying F6F's, F4U's and F8F's.

Sincerely,

E. Royce Williams

Encl: Mig Story by ERW

This enclosure "Mig Story by ERW" is not attached. It can be found in file "Williams, Royce (1) .doc" in folder "BSP - VF-781 - VF - 121 .doc."

The referenced story from the Princeton Newsletter follows:

USS PRINCETON
Newsletter

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P.O. BOX 19449, SAN DIEGO, CA 92119 • (619)287-6806

NAVY DENIED MiG SHOOT DOWN IN '52

***The Forgotten Dog-Fight
Of the Forgotten War***

It was November, 1952, and Task Force 77 was steaming North in the western part of the Sea of Japan. They were approximately 100 miles southeast of where North Korea, Manchuria and Russia border together near the port of Vladivostok.

The American fleet was being tracked on radar by all three communist countries and the telephone lines were humming.

It was the second winter of the Korean war which had developed into a stalemate on the ground near the 38th parallel, and political stalemate in the United Nations building in New York City.

Aboard the USS Oriskany (CVA-34), everything was routine. The movie for the evening was "Singin' in the Rain" with Gene Kelly. It would win the academy award for the best picture of the year in 1952.

At dawn, TF-77 was only 50 miles from Vladivostok, USSR, as they went to "flight quarters". The first launch by two carriers was the CAP (Carrier [sic] Air Patrol) and a Photo Reconnaissance mission over North Korea. All of the aircraft that were catapulted were Grumman F9F Panthers. It was overcast, with a chilly sea haze as the aircraft disappeared from view. Twenty minutes later, CIC (Combat Information Center) called the bridge and said, "Bridge, we have a contact!"

Two large blips appeared on the radar screens of all the ships in the Task Force. They were high speed, from the land, and heading straight for the fleet. CIC instructed the CAP to "Intercept, identify and stay cool."

"They are MiG-15s," reported the Navy pilot. "Sixteen aircraft in two formations." The MiGs made a high speed wide circle of the Task Force, traveling about 650 mph. The four F9Fs pushed their throttle forward to the maximum speed but were left in the "prop wash" of the faster MiGs. After about 20 minutes of darting in different directions, four MiGs peeled off and

- missing a section -

other calls to Military Intelligence offices and received the same answer. Next, he obtained a list of all ships that were in TF-77 in November, '52. He also discovered that one of the destroyers was in port, in Sasebo, and alone. He traveled to Sasebo and went aboard the destroyer, pretending to do a story on the skipper. He freely walked into the Radar-room and talked with the white hats, who knew nothing about the "code of silence". They talked openly about the MiG shoot down and the Chief even showed him the official log and let him listed to the recording.

Three weeks later, the Oriskany docked in Yokosuka for R&R [rest and recuperation period]. Bob Vermillion of the AP was there, waiting. He went aboard the ship and soon discovered that squadron VF-781 flew the CAP mission on the day in question. And,

after more nosing around among the Squadron enlisted men, he made an official request to interview pilots LT(jg) W.D. Middleton and LT R. Williams.

A week later, a meeting was held in the ward room. Vermillion was surprised to find a room full of Navy brass plus the two pilots. As he started to ask questions, everybody denied knowing anything about a MiG shoot down. Vermillion started to show his frustration and annoyance. Finally, the Navy Information Officer stood up and politely said in a southern drawl, "Mr. Vermillion, we respectfully ask you to understand our position as military men. We are sworn to obey our orders."

The AP reporter sat for a minute thinking. Then he stood up and put his notepads in his briefcase and thanked everybody for their time. He walked to the door, opened it and paused. He turned to the two pilots and asked, "By the way, how did you boys get those Navy Crosses displayed on your chests?"

The pilots looked at each other with a sheepish grin and lowered their heads. The Information Officer smiled and said, "Mr. Vermillion, ya'll have a nice day, ya hear?"

Bob Vermillion returned to Tokyo and filed a "no story" report. His records were put into a folder and filed away. The "air incident" became just another forgotten war story of the forgotten war. ■

PS

But there is a postscript to this story. In the Fall, 1955 issue of THE HOOK magazine, published by The Tailhook Association, it is revealed that the Navy shot down 6 MiG-15s during the Korean War. All the kills were made by Grumman F9F Panthers without a single loss. The first jet-to-jet combat victory was by LCDR William T. Amen, skipper of VF-111, on November 9, 1950. The final Navy kills of the Korean war occurred on 18 November 1952 when LTJG W.D. Middleton and LT R. Williams of VF-781, downed two Soviet MiG-15s off Vladivostok when the Russian pilots became a threat to the U.S. task force.

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