



CLOSE-AND FAST-AIR SUPPORT



## 13 BLACK PONIES

COMBAT REPORTS FROM  
NAVY VAL-4 LIGHT ATTACK  
SQUADRON FLYING THE

OV-10 *"Bronco"*

“SAIGON, Jan. 22 (AP) —Some 400 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops stormed out of the U Minh Forest early today and made their biggest attack in the Mekong Delta in two months. They attacked a South Vietnamese Marine Brigade Command Post. U. S. Navy planes scrambled from Binh Thuy Air Base and raked the enemy with five-inch rockets. The enemy force pulled out, leaving 72 bodies and more than a score of weapons on the battlefield.”

The aircraft cited in this news story were North American Rockwell's OV-10A Broncos, the “13 Black Ponies” making up the Navy's VAL-4 Light Attack Squadron which became operational in the Mekong Delta region only last April. From that date through November, these 13 aircraft and their handful of pilots have scored an almost unbelievable record—482 enemy killed (confirmed), 545 enemy killed (probable), 782 structures destroyed, 200 bunkers destroyed, and 288 sampans destroyed.

This little-known squadron already has been officially commended many times for providing responsive close air support which saved ground units from being overrun by enemy attacking forces. On many of these occasions, the OV-10's were being flown at night in adverse weather and under low clouds which prevented the use of high performance attack aircraft. During one of these battles, 60 enemy troops were killed by the Bronco attacks; 30 were slain in another incident; and during a recent November response to calls for air support from a beleaguered friendly ground force, two “Black Pony” flights killed 45 enemy troops in rescuing the unit.

The maneuverability and slow-speed characteristics of the aircraft, and the disruptive striking force of five-inch rockets and 20mm guns with their permissive low-level delivery, are primary aspects in the success of these missions. On another November day, a single VAL-4 OV-10 flew one patrol flight and six scramble missions, delivering a total of 84 five-inch rockets, 133 smaller rockets, and 21,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition on enemy targets, for a total ordnance weight in excess of 12,000 pounds.

During last October, the VAL-4 pilots and their 13 aircraft flew more combat sorties than all 7th Fleet strike aircraft (742 to 712). They also killed more enemy troops and destroyed more targets, and it was not uncommon for them to fly more than 40 sorties in one day. The record shows VAL-4, in October, was credited with 102 enemy troops killed (confirmed) and 205 probable kills; 58 bunkers destroyed, 22 damaged; 76 sampans destroyed, 18 damaged; 151 structures destroyed and 57 damaged. The Navy Times reported 7th Fleet aircraft in October destroyed 150 military structures, 43 bunkers, one sampan, three weapons positions, and killed one enemy soldier.

The events cited above are not infrequent occurrences in the VAL-4 routine of operations, as can be confirmed by the following quotes from the men who are on the scene. These actions have become almost commonplace for the pilots in VAL-4, who fly the “13 Black Ponies.”

#### CRIPPLES ENEMY

“On the night of 28 November 1969, OV-10A's were diverted from routine patrol to assist troops in contact near Dong Tam which resulted in 55 enemy KIA (body count) with 30 KIA by air. This heavy loss of personnel cripples the enemy's offensive capabilities and destroys his morale and willingness to fight. The Dong Tam action indicates, once again, that VAL-4's reputation for immediate response, aggressiveness, and outstanding aerial proficiency is well founded. Well done and keep striking.” *Vice Admiral Zumwalt.*

#### TWO STRIKES KILL 49

“The OV-10 ready alert crews were unusually active Thursday and Friday when both detachments scrambled for a total of nine times. Two of the scramble strikes resulted in a BDA count of 49 enemy troops killed, which prompted another ‘attaboy’ message from Commander Task Force 116.”

#### OCTOBER RECORD

“Frequency of air strikes by VAL-4 night patrols continue to increase. The squadron has been informed that confirmed results of Black Pony air strikes during October exceeded those of all other tactical air units in country. On one day, two flights accounted for 45 enemy troops.”

#### SAVES GROUND UNIT

"A ground unit in the Delta became surrounded during the night by enemy troops and could not reach the extraction point on the river bank for boat pickup. Navy Broncos were scrambled from the Vung Tau detachment. The night air strike demanded exceptional accuracy since the ground unit could not reveal their position. Poor visibility and a 500-foot ceiling prevailed when the flight arrived over target. Although the situation denied use of flares, the outline of the river bank, guarded use of a strobe light, and whispered radio transmissions from the ground unit provided enough ground reference to commence the attack. Initial attacks were limited to the minigun pod and sponson guns because of the low ceiling. Later, the ceiling lifted to 1500 feet and Zuni 5-inch rockets were employed. An extraction route to the river was progressively cleared, with the ground troops moving along behind until they were finally able to reach the boats and depart the area with no casualties. Enemy casualties were unknown until receipt of message from COMNAVFORV citing documented evidence that the enemy had lost 60 troops, the highest number of casualties inflicted by any previous air strike. The Black Pony flight was commended for precise fire under adverse conditions."

#### NOW PRAISES OV-10

"At the beginning, I was a disbeliever in the potential usefulness of the OV-10 in this environment. I was completely wrong. I am now as completely honest in my praise of the OV-10. The Bronco is beautiful. It is really an outstanding airplane and doing a tremendous job. If the requirement existed, we could cover the entire Delta with the OV-10. The beauty of this bird is its range, loiter time, weapons accuracy and maneuverability. I have flown the bird for four and a half hours on one sortie. That's a long flight. I was tired, but the fact remains if we have the requirement, the OV-10A can do the job."

#### ALLOWS EVACUATION

"The second night patrol from Detachment Alpha at Binh Thuy had been airborne only 10 minutes when they were diverted to the Rach Gia area where two PBR boats with troops aboard had been ambushed and badly hit. The Bronco flight effectively attacked the enemy positions, allowing the evacuation of the wounded by Army medivac helos."

#### RELIEVES AMBUSHED BOATS

"One incident occurred this week that involved Black Pony air support for a surface unit in serious trouble. Five PBR boats were ambushed from a small village along a canal. One of the boats ran aground and the crew sustained casualties. The Black Pony patrol

arrived overhead at the beginning of the attack and suppressed the enemy fire while the casualties were recovered from the stricken boat and the remaining four boats retreated. The alert status OV-10 flight was scrambled from Binh Thuy and the patrol flight delivered remaining ordnance on the enemy while the scrambled flight was enroute. This alert flight arrived on the scene and completed total destruction of the enemy installations. Some 21 structures were destroyed along with three sampans and a large secondary explosion was observed. Number of enemy killed not known but believed to be substantial."

#### DESTROYS 11 SAMPANS

"An Air Force FAC enroute home advised an airborne night OV-10 patrol of the location of a group of 25 enemy sampans. The FAC reported he had called for TAC AIR, but after 40 minutes of waiting over the target, he was forced to leave the area because of low fuel. The Black Ponies found the sampans on the first flare illumination and destroyed 11."

#### ENEMY LOSES 65 TROOPS

"One OV-10 flight was scrambled at approximately 3 a.m. in response to a call from an outpost under attack. The flight found another outpost nearby also under attack and provided fire support for both. A preliminary report from the outposts listed the enemy losing 65 troops in the engagement as a result of the air strikes."

#### AVERAGES 80 HOURS

"Each OV-10 averages about 80 hours in the air per month, solid indication that it is one of the most reliable and rugged airplanes ever designed for the job of supporting our forces over here."

#### TOUGH HIDE

"The OV-10 has a tough hide. One Bronco, not mine, took 15 hits and came in with a smashed electrical panel and riddled aileron. Landed beautifully. No sweat. And the ejection seats also give us a hell of a boost in morale, if we ever have to get out."

#### ACCURATE FIRE POWER

"The Mekong Delta is the bread-basket for that part of the world and the enemy is fighting hard to take it. One of his favorite tricks is to set up elaborate ambushes for our choppers and boats, but the Broncos have taken the initiative with their speed and maneuverability, plus accurate firepower. The OV-10 is really proving itself in combat."



(From an article by Arnold Abrams, Southeast Asia correspondent of the Seattle Times)

The action started when the 907th Regional Force Company, one of two RF companies patrolling the district, walked into a deadly ambush set by a 100-man Vietcong outfit. Its companion RF unit, the 104th Company, simultaneously was pinned down nearby by a single enemy squad.

The besieged troops radioed for reinforcements and air support. While a third RF company was being dispatched to the scene, Captain John Phillips, an American pilot flying a fixed-wing Black Pony (OV-10A) fighter, came to the rescue. He was overhead within minutes, arriving just as the attackers launched a standup charge to overrun the ambushed company.

"More than 50 of them coming right at you," he radioed

Lieutenant Daniel Cenis, the 907th's American advisor. "Hang on, I'm coming in." And in he came, sending a salvo of six rockets into the enemy's midst. A thunderous explosion left 30 guerrillas dead or dying, and sent the rest staggering in dazed retreat. In a matter of seconds, an action sequence normally enacted on Hollywood sets had saved the lives of about 100 South Vietnamese and several American advisors.

Phillips, known by the code name Swamp Fox, is a legendary figure among advisors on the Delta because he specializes in such exploits. "Swamp Fox," Cenis communicated later, "I want to thank you for the fast help. You saved our lives out here." "Don't mention it," replied Swamp Fox, "it was my pleasure." Countered Cenis: "Not nearly as much as it was mine."



## APRIL THRU DECEMBER - 13 AIRCRAFT

- 5,395 SORTIES
- 897 STRUCTURES DESTROYED
- 751 ENEMY KILLED (CONFIRMED)
- 239 BUNKERS DESTROYED
- 672 ENEMY KILLED (PROBABLE)
- 307 SAMPANS DESTROYED