

Third Line Period, Part Two

For the third line period Pt.2, the U.S.S. Hancock operated at Yankee Station. Starting on 20 May, CVW-21 F-8s took off their bomb racks and commenced operations in Route Package 4 and 6B.

Yankee Station

3rd Line Period: 13 May – 31 May
In port Hong Kong: 05 June – 13 June

Combat in MAY 1972



20 May

On the 20th Gene “Cowboy” Brotherton and I flew a BARCAP mission then recovered at Da Nang (DAG). We then flew to Ubon (UBN), Thailand as guests of the 334th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) for a night on the beach.

At Ubon, we found the Air Force live in a different universe than the Navy...

We were met at the flight line by our host with “Cold Beer” waiting. The 334th based at Seymour Johnson AFB NC was on temporary duty to Ubon attached to 25th TFS. They had base housing and their wives and girl friends accompanied them. They had a BBQ party that evening, what a contrast to the way we lived on the boat... The morning of the 21st, “Cowboy and I flew back to the Hancock. That afternoon, I would fly a MIGCAP mission to Hanoi...



21 May – MIGCAP Gia Lam

“With the recent MIG activities this was a desirable assignment with a good chance of MIG action. The skipper, “Dusty” Rhodes, requested to be assigned this mission with wingman, Jerry “Turkey” Tucker. I was assigned spare, to launch if the CO or “Turkey” had mechanical problems. “There was no chance either would have problems that would cause them to miss this mission.



Both the Skipper and Turkey have
mechanical problems.

"I was launched as flight lead and Pete "Litning" Phelps from VF-24 was diverted from his mission to join me.
There was a line of weather buildups along the coast. Just north of the Hour Glass there was a slight break in the clouds, we turned west going "Feet Dry".



21 May – MIGCAP Gia Lam

As we continued up the Red River valley toward our MIGCAP station, the weather did not improve.

Red Crown advised us the mission was cancelled and all strike aircraft were feet wet. Not wanting to fly back down the Red River Valley, we went south over Bai Thuong looking for MIGs then east to the gulf.

At Bai Thuong we orbited the field trying to entice the MIGs to come up. None did, so we strafed the field and headed out.

Found out later, that was a dumb thing to do.



Pete "Litning" Phelps' 1972 Journal



Pete "Litning" Phelps, email to P.D. Colson May 16, 2024:

"I remember the MIGCAP well - after the strike went feet wet, you & I headed toward the MIG field we were 'blocking', then decided we wanted a Kill. So we orbited the field, on opposite sides of a circle, trying to bait a MIG to come up. None did, so we RTB'd. I got a minor dressing down from Snake Morris (XO), saying that the field was not on the list of appropriate targets I'll look it up z it's gotta be in there! More soon."

From Pete's 1972 Journal:

21 MAY
Sun
0400-0600 Alert 5 2 hour nap then
BARCAP with CO just off Haiphong - no
farther south than off hourglass. Then
go CUX from TARCAP manned spare for BC
Launched for "single plane AIC" Bullshit
Got tanked and joined with Phil Colson (VF211)
vectored in near hourglass took 20-30 rounds
of AAA, up red river to 20 mi so of
Hanoi. Too much weather to go farther
so we took up a fast cap station
NNW of Thanh Hoa. Saw Bai Thung
Airfield where 6 MIG 21's and 6 MIG 17's
were holed up, but after 4 laps
around field @ 4000' - no one came
up so after the Midway-Kitty Hawk
strikes went out we strafed the
field for spite and headed out

Sun

21 May

0400-0600 Alert 5 2 hour nap then BARCAP with
CO just off Haiphong - no farther south than off
hourglass. Then got canceled from TARCAP
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Colson (VF-211) vectored in near hourglass took
20-30 rounds of AAA, up red river to 20 mi so of
Hanoi. Too much weather to go further so we took
up a fast cap station NNW of Thanh Hoa. Saw Bai
Thoung Airfield where 6 MIG 21s and 6 MIG 17s
were holed up, but after 4 laps around field @
2000'-4000' no one came up so after the Midway &
Kitty Hawks strikes were out we strafed the field
for spite and headed out

[AIC, flight to provide Air Intercept Controllers required
proficiency training.]

23 May 1972

LCDR Frank Bachman and LT Jerry Tucker's MIG encounter.

The F-8 Crusader's final victory of the war in Vietnam. Much has been written about the encounter, but it remains the explanation point on the story of the legendary "MiG Master."

"One MiG down, no weapons fired!"



24 May 1972

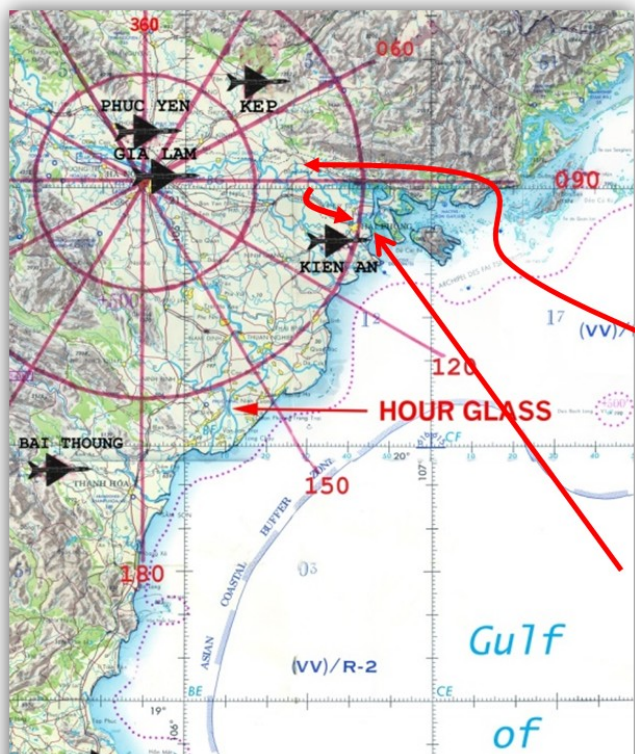
LT Carroll "Gringo" Beeler, VF-24 Shot Down, (POW)

On the 24 May, VF-24 CO, CDR Jack Batzler, with his wingman LT Carroll "Gringo" Beeler were on a TARCAP mission north west of Hai Phong.

During the mission LT Beeler's F-8 was hit by a SA-2 missile over Hai Phong harbor.

LT Beeler was taken POW and sent to the "Hanoi Hilton" complex in Hanoi. He was released 28 March 1973 during Operation Homecoming.

LT Beeler was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service while interned as a Prisoner of War.



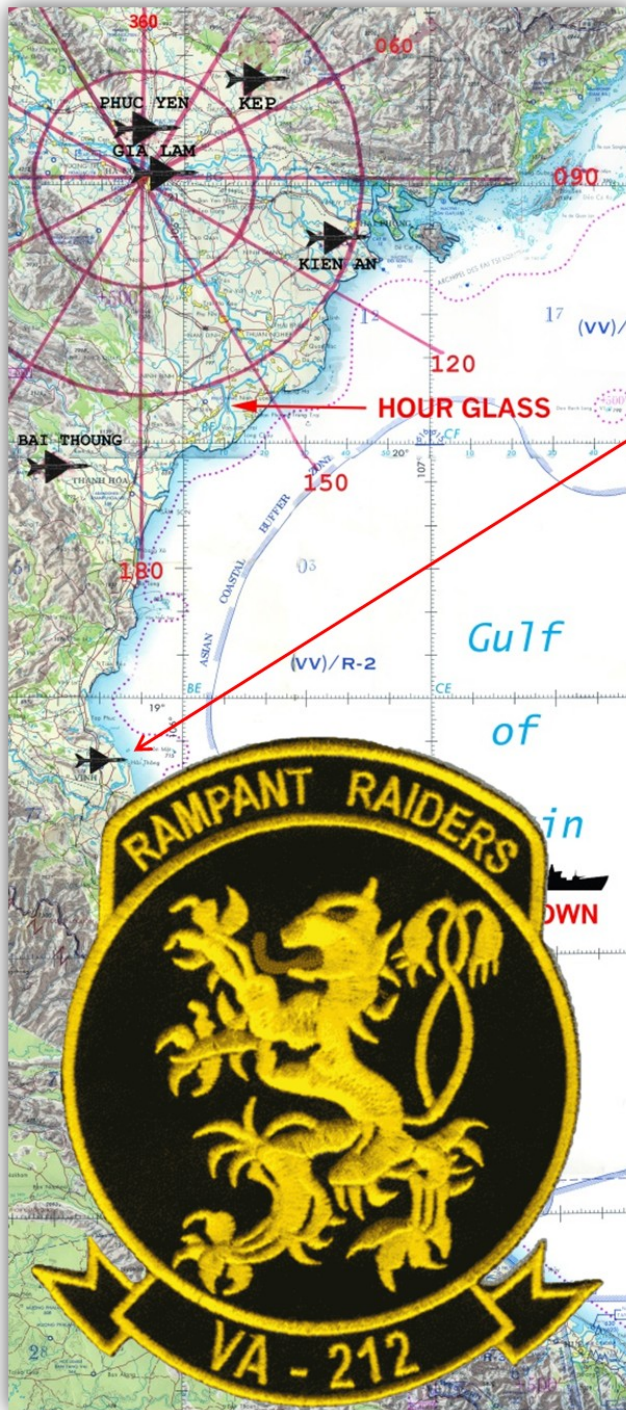
25 May 1972
VA-212, weather divert.



25 May 1972

CDR. Hank Strong (VA-212 CO) Shot Down.

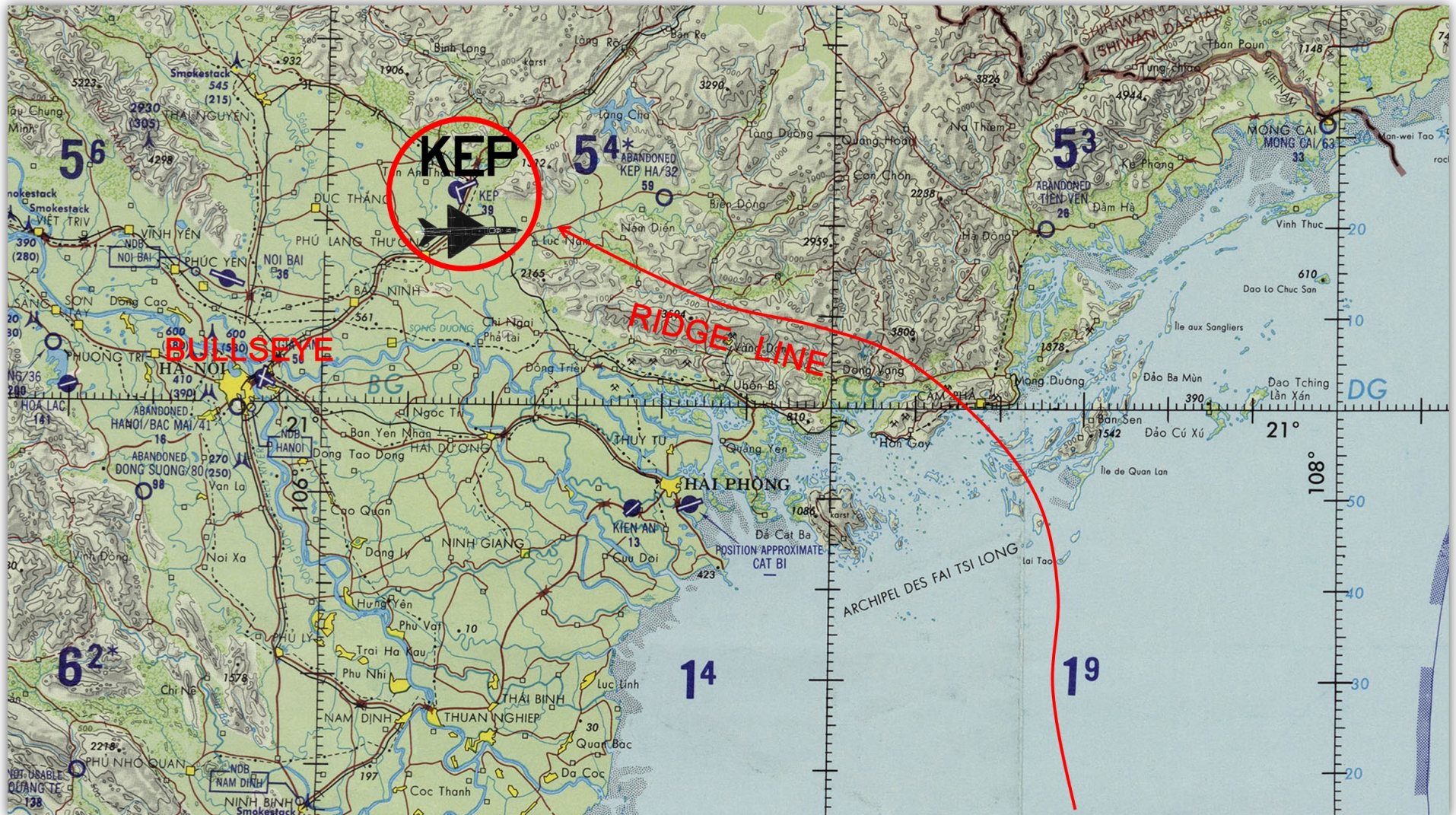
Cdr. Henry Hooker "Hank" Strong Jr. entered the U.S. Navy from Pennsylvania and was a member of Attack Squadron 212, embarked aboard the USS Hancock (CVA 19). On May 25, 1972, he was the pilot of a single-seat A-4F Skyhawk (bureau number 155045) that departed the Hancock as the lead in a thirty plane flight on a strike mission against enemy targets in North Vietnam. Enroute, the aircraft were unable to proceed to the primary target because of adverse weather so Cdr. Strong diverted the flight to their secondary target, which was a highway bridge and military storage complex located in the vicinity of Vinh. Once at the target, Cdr. Strong called "Rolling in," and proceeded to lead the attack on the bridge. His Skyhawk was then hit by intense anti-aircraft artillery fire. Radio contact with him was lost, and no parachutes were observed or rescue beepers detected. Search efforts were unsuccessful in locating Cdr. Strong or his aircraft.



26 May 1972

MIGCAP "Kep"

On the 26th of May, in support of an Alpha Strike near Hanoi, we scheduled two Loose Deuce sections for MIGCAP over KEP Air Base. LCDR Boyd Repsher with LT Hank Livingston were in one section, I was in the other section with LCDR Frank Wood.



“Approaching Kep”

Two weeks earlier, VF-96 got three MIG kills over KEP. With the MIG activity in May, we anticipated action. Action we got, but not MIGs . . .

this time SAMs.

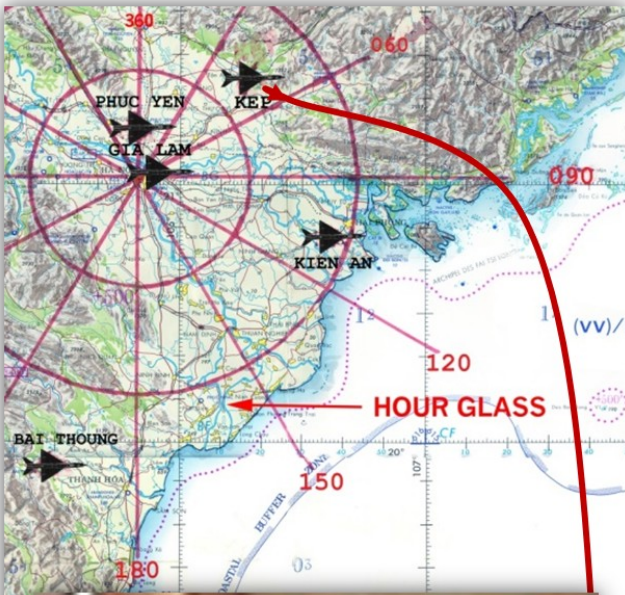


“Drifty” out maneuvers a SA-2.

Several SAMs were fired, but did not track, they would go up to about 60,000 feet and explode.

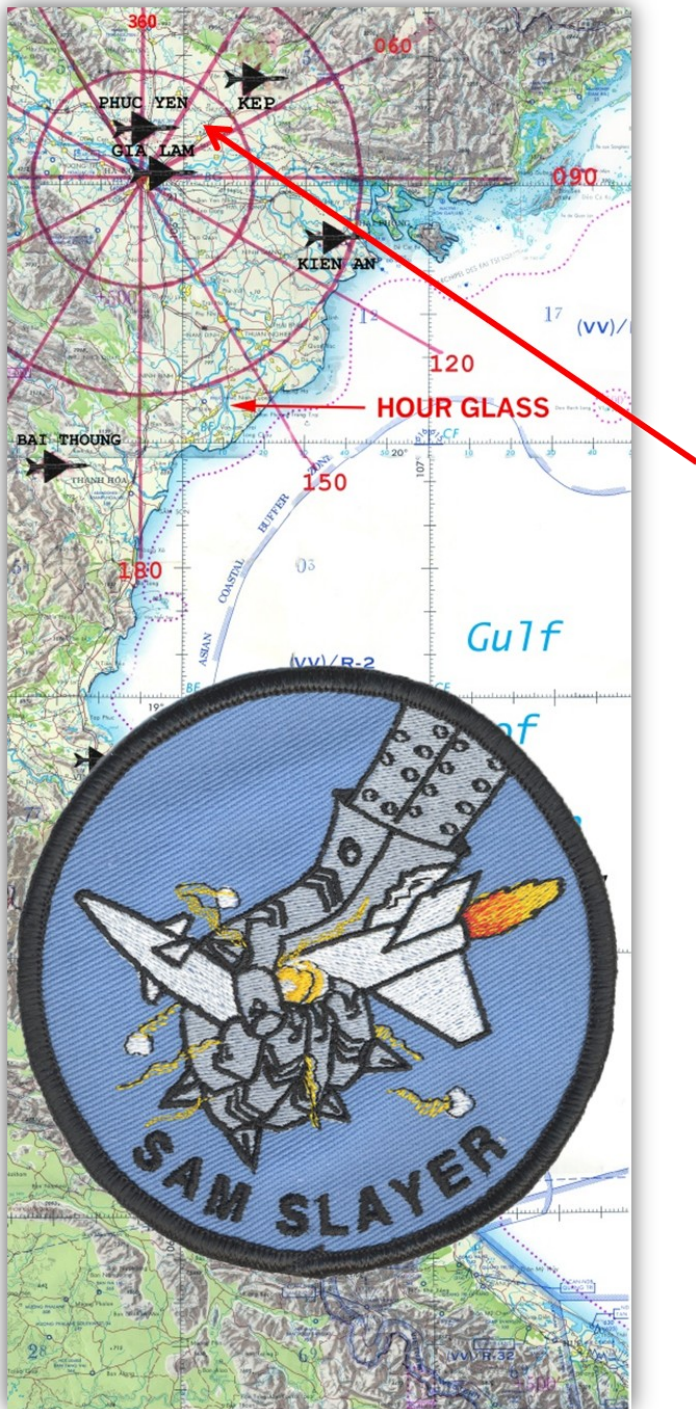
One was different . . . We all saw the SAM lift off and begin tracking.

Henry “Drifty” Livingston reported a singer low then singer high followed by *“It’s tracking at me”*. Drifty turned into the SAM forcing the missile to overshoot. I remember seeing the explosion of the SAM, then seeing the silhouette of the F-8 and hearing Drifty’s relieved radio transmission, *“It Missed”*



27 May 1972

With the SAM activity on the 26th VA-55 was assigned Iron Hand (surface-to-air missile, SAM suppression) for CVW-21's Alpha Strike on the 27th



AGM-45 Shrike anti-radiation missile designed to home in on anti-aircraft radar

27 May 1972

LT. Thomas Latendresse (VA-55) Shot Down, (POW).



20 through 27 May 1972

It was an event filled seven days.

- 20 May: BARCAP then RON Ubon, Thailand
- 21 May: MIGCAP Gia Lam, Hanoi
- 23 May: Bachman/Tucker MIG kill
- 24 May: Lt. Beeler, VF-24 shot down. POW
- 25 May: CDR. Strong, VA-212 CO shot down KIA
- 26 May: MIGCAP Kep, north east of Hanoi
- 27 May: Lt. Latrondresse, VA-55 shot down, POW

At the time I was not aware of the fact that May 1972 would set records for the most action in the air war over Vietnam.

31 May, the last day of the third line period of the 1972 WEATPAC cruise



After the third line period R&R HONG KONG

