

and-television station. There is no wasted space. Despite her bulk, the *Forrestal* resembles a finely calibrated instrument. Air operations at Yankee Station continue almost around the clock. The giant steam catapults hiss and thunder. The crews on the flight deck, clad in multi-colored jerseys and wearing caps called "Mickey Mouse ears," move with the precision of ballet dancers. Now, at 10:51:30, they were pulling the chocks from under the wheels of their planes, looking for leaks and closing the access panels.

Lt. Cmdr. John S. McCain III, a 30-year-old, prematurely gray Annapolis graduate, was hunched over the controls of his A-4 Skyhawk. His plane was third in line for launch, and he had almost completed his preflight checks. Trim setting—OK. Gauges, lights, altimeter, electronics gear—all OK.

claimed. "I thought you were dead."

Hope, in fact, was very lucky to be alive. By 10:52 he had nearly finished checking out his Skyhawk No. 414, three slots behind McCain. There is no standard procedure for leaving an aircraft in this kind of emergency, but Hope, who has logged more than 1,600 hours in the little "Scooters," reacted quickly. Vaulting over the right side of his aircraft, he scrambled toward the safety net at the edge of the deck. The first explosion blew him into the starboard catwalk; he landed on top of two other men. His plane had disappeared; in its place was a crater. "I knew I was going to make it," he recalls. "Explosions always seemed to go off just where I'd been. I ran to the hangar bay, yelling like a fool: 'Turn on the sprinkler system, turn on the sprinkler system.'"

At 10:52 Art McCann, a stocky,

around for Patane, then spotted a mechanic who was holding out his hand. Dollarhide grabbed—and held on. A second bomb exploded. Shrapnel whistled over his head and slammed into the fuselage of an RA-5C Vigilante. Seconds later he reached the island. Maintenance Chief McCann was already there trying to comfort the badly burned sailor. "Knock me out, knock me out," the sailor was screaming. "Just kill me and get it over with."

The fire was spreading in a counterclockwise direction. The A-4's on the port side of the flight deck had already blown apart. Now the puddles of flame were skipping toward the larger planes, the F-4's and RA-5C's parked on the starboard side. Strapped into the cockpit of one F-4 was a sandy-haired Californian named Lt. (j.g.) Flack Logan. Logan remembers thinking—inane—that the fire might delay his launch. Then he jumped. "I hit the deck," he recalls, "and I made a quick count. I still had two hands and two feet, and I really put them to use."

For Capt. John K. Beling, the *Forrestal*'s quietly capable skipper, this day was already seven-and-one-half hours old. The night before, the *Forrestal* had taken on hundreds of tons of ammunition from the supply ship USS *Diamond Head*. At 3:16 A.M. one of the sailors stowing the ammunition had slipped on the hangar deck and fallen overboard. Within two minutes Beling had reached the bridge and dispatched a helicopter to search for the man.

The rescue effort was unsuccessful, but Beling remained on the bridge. At 6 o'clock the *Forrestal*'s catapults had boomed two fighter planes aloft; at 7:30 they sent the day's first strike of 37 aircraft toward enemy targets. Beling watched with satisfaction as all of the planes returned. At 9:41 he left his post to keep an appointment with barber Ray DeVici. At 10:52 he was changing clothes in his sea cabin.

Fires aboard an aircraft carrier are surprisingly routine; just two days before, in fact, there had been two minor blazes. But when Beling heard the call bell from the bridge, he knew instinctively that this was no ordinary fire. Grabbing his white, sound-powered telephone, he listened to the navigator's initial report, then rushed—shirtless—to the bridge 25 feet away. Immediately he ordered general quarters—the call for all hands to man battle stations. The ship was still cruising at 27 knots into a five-knot wind. The wind was keeping the fire aft, but it was also fanning the flames, so Beling ordered the speed reduced to 15 knots. Then he turned. "Orderly," he said. "Bring me my shirt."

Grim reports were pouring into the bridge. Most of the men in the first fire-fighting and salvage crews had either been killed or wounded; the stumps of their hoses flopped awkwardly on the deck. The aft fire-fighting stations were gone; sailors had to combat the flames from positions at the island and bow. The bombs were gouging huge holes in the two-inch-thick steel deck and slamming shrapnel into the tanks of nearby planes. The burning fuel was dripping through the

cracks and craters, down into the catwalks and hatches and passageways, down into the hangar bays below. If it reached the magazines, hundreds of tons of ammunition might explode. Beling picked up the telephone, dialed 887, and spoke to Cmdr. Mervin Rowland, his chief engineer.

Rowland, a lumbering, shaggy-browed North Carolinian, had stayed awake all night supervising the repair of a steering engine. Finally, at 8:30, he had tumbled into bed. He has been in the Navy for 28 years and, as he says, "Bells wake me real easy." At 10:52 he was racing toward Damage Control Central on the fourth deck of the ship. Clad only in skivvies and socks, he carried his pants and shirt. Then it occurred to him that he should return for his shoes. He might need them; the deck would be hot.

By 10:54 Rowland entered Damage Control Central and took his seat in a swivel chair marked CHIEF SNIPE. In an emergency this room is the *Forrestal*'s nerve center. All around him enlisted men—telephones cradled on their shoulders—were scribbling damage-assessment reports on slips of paper, then handing the slips to other men who transferred the data onto diagrams of the ship's spaces.

Already the order had gone out for "Condition Zebra"—dog down all doors and hatches; make the ship as watertight as possible. As senior damage-control officer, Rowland's main responsibility was to keep the fire from spreading. Five electric and four steam-operated pumps were spewing out 13,000 gallons of high-capacity foam per minute. He wondered whether that would be enough. He wondered also about the explosives in the aft magazine and relayed his worries to Captain Beling. "Flood the magazine," Beling ordered. It was 10:56.

Just before the fire broke out, Rear Adm. Harvey P. Lanham, commander of Carrier Division 2, had been leafing through intelligence reports in his cabin. Their contents seemed particularly gratifying: The *Forrestal*'s pilots should encounter less flak than usual. At the first word of fire, Lanham ran to the flag bridge as fast as his long legs could carry him. The carrier *Oriskany*, herself the victim of a fire last October, was steaming 15 miles astern. He grabbed the telephone, reached Adm. Walter Curtis Jr., commander of Carrier Division 9, and pleaded for assistance: doctors and corpsmen, oxygen masks, high-capacity foam, helicopters and destroyers to pick up sailors in the *Forrestal*'s wake.

"Look out for that window, Admiral," his chief of staff shouted. "It's not safety glass." Lanham ducked. Three seconds later a bomb exploded—shattering the window.

At 10:52 Lt. I. B. Fuller, a husky, dark-haired doctor from Arkadelphia, Ark., had been thinking almost entirely of food. He had missed breakfast that morning; he was terribly hungry and he had guessed—correctly—that the menu for the 11 o'clock serving in Officers' Wardroom 2 would feature roast beef. Now, as one explosion followed another, he raced to a battle

'KNOCK ME OUT,' CRIED
THE WOUNDED SAILOR. 'KILL ME
AND GET IT OVER WITH.'

Then an object—perhaps a missile—streaked across the flight deck.

"I heard a whooshy sound," McCain recalls. "I looked up. Fuel was spreading all around my plane, and the fire was following. Men were running out with their clothes on fire; other men were jumping on them. I disconnected the straps and opened my canopy. The flames were more intense to the rear, so I climbed out to the refueling probe on the nose, jumped about ten feet and rolled through the edge of the fire.

"I saw a chief petty officer running across the deck with a bottle of PKP extinguisher in his hand. He headed toward the flames, and then he was in the flames. I looked back and saw another pilot from my squadron leaping from his plane. He fell into the fire. He was burning. I started to run toward him. Some men with a fire hose passed me. Then the first bomb exploded. I was knocked down. The pilot, the chief, the firemen—they disappeared."

Wounded by shrapnel in his chest, legs and knee, McCain stumbled to the catwalk, then made his way through billowing smoke down to a hangar bay. There he spotted his friend, 35-year-old Lt. Cmdr. Herbert A. Hope. "God, am I glad to see you," McCain ex-

claimed. "I thought you were dead." Hope, in fact, was very lucky to be alive. By 10:52 he had nearly finished checking out his Skyhawk No. 414, three slots behind McCain. There is no standard procedure for leaving an aircraft in this kind of emergency, but Hope, who has logged more than 1,600 hours in the little "Scooters," reacted quickly. Vaulting over the right side of his aircraft, he scrambled toward the safety net at the edge of the deck. The first explosion blew him into the starboard catwalk; he landed on top of two other men. His plane had disappeared; in its place was a crater. "I knew I was going to make it," he recalls. "Explosions always seemed to go off just where I'd been. I ran to the hangar bay, yelling like a fool: 'Turn on the sprinkler system, turn on the sprinkler system.'"

At 10:52 Art McCann, a stocky, balding maintenance chief for Attack Squadron 46, had been standing 12 feet away from Skyhawk No. 405. Now, 30 seconds later, he couldn't even see the plane. Two men ran toward him out of the flames. One was on fire from the waist up. The other was burning, too, and part of his shoulder was gone. McCann hollered at the first man to roll on the deck. Then he grabbed the second sailor and tried to drag him toward the carrier's control tower—known as the island. As he staggered forward, he brushed against a fallen form. Lt. (j.g.) David Dollarhide, a 25-year-old pilot from Jackson, Miss. McCann paused, realized that he could not carry both men, and moved on.

Dollarhide's foot had stuck in the canopy railing as he tried to leap from his plane. He had landed on his right side, fracturing his hip; burning fuel was spreading toward him. Joseph Patane, a 19-year-old airman, saw Dollarhide rocking back and forth. "Stand up on your good leg," Patane yelled. But Dollarhide couldn't move. Patane rushed forward and slung the pilot over his shoulder. He had taken only a few steps when a bomb blast knocked both men to the deck, gashing them with shrapnel. Dollarhide looked

dressing station on the 02 level. "I saw a boy who had been disemboweled. There were burns all over his face and arms, but he was still alive. I gave him a shot of morphine and put a compress bandage over his open abdomen. Then I sent him down to sick bay. He died on the operating table."

Fuller has difficulty recalling the events of the next few moments. He knows he gave morphine to dozens of casualties and checked them for sucking chest wounds. He knows, too, that he kept shouting for stretcher-bearers. He also remembers stepping through a hatch and finding a young sailor lying on his stomach. He turned the boy's head, looked down, and then tried desperately to forget what he'd seen.

New casualties began flooding the sick bay. Some were moaning; others, deep in shock, stared vacantly ahead. Doctors and corpsmen moved among them, administering drugs and trying to stop the bleeding. Already they had initiated the "triage"—the process by which they separate men into three categories: those who will survive; those who should survive with proper care; those who will die anyway. Chaplain Geoffrey Gaugham, a crew-cut Benedictine monk from Indiana, was watching them work. He had no way of distinguishing the men's religious affiliations, so he took his holy oils and offered a general absolution. Some men took him for a doctor. "They kept saying, 'I'm OK, doc,'" he recalls; "take care of someone else."

Flattened by the first explosion, Chief Petty Officer David Lyons received shrapnel in his face, legs, hip and back. Stretcher-bearers had carried him into the sick bay, where corpsmen removed the fragments. They had not yet sewn up his wounds. Lyons felt useless. He waited until he was sure no one was watching him, then swung out of bed and started climbing up to the flight deck. But he had lost too much blood. Corpsmen found him there and brought him back.

Lt. Massoud (Sam) Mowad, a 29-year-old dentist from Waterbury, Conn., was treating casualties at a temporary first-aid station in the fo'c'sle. Volunteers had brought up cots and plasma, and now somebody was running toward him, dragging an 18-year-old sailor whose right foot was hanging from his calf only by shreds of muscle and tendon. Mowad had never performed an amputation before. Calmly, trying to remember what he had learned in college, he wrapped a tourniquet above the man's knee and started to cut.

Flames were dancing through the last of the F-4's on the starboard side of the flight deck. Sidewinder and Sparrow missiles were spontaneously "cooking off"; ejection seats were blasting into the air like Roman candles. Fire-fighting crews were pouring thousands of gallons of foam onto the burning aircraft. The foam bubbled and steamed on the deck, and the men had to pause to spray each other's feet.

"Push that goddamn thing outta the way!" Lt. Cmdr. Wes Wolfe was shouting, pointing at a flaming RA-5C Vigilante. "Tractor King" Larry Cope,

a 23-year-old Iowan, jumped on a fork-lift truck and rammed the plane. A single hose played on his back; he hardly felt the water. The prongs of his fork lift stuck in the wreckage. He couldn't move forward, he couldn't retreat. Cope jumped from his seat, looked in vain for another tractor, and then hopped aboard again. He pushed a second time. The burning plane tumbled into the sea.

On the starboard side of the island lay the "bomb farm"—a vast storage area where 50 or 60 bombs had been loaded on carts for the day's final launch. Within seconds after the sounding of general quarters, a small group of men rushed toward this farm. Among them was Lt. Otis Kight.

Kight had been aboard the *Yorktown* when it went down in 1942; he had served on the *Bennington* during its 1954 fire. Now, on the *Forrestal*, he was a data analyst—relying upon computers to tell him, for example, how many tires the carrier's F-4's would use up in a given week. The same computers would doubtless have told him that it is physically impossible for a 140-pound man to pick up a 250-pound bomb and dispose of it. "I was just too old to be scared," Kight explains. "I looked at one of those bombs and said to myself, 'It's only an empty beer can. It should go over the side.'" It did.

A few feet away from Kight, on the edge of the bomb farm, stood Lt. (j.g.) Robert Cates, the 26-year-old explosive ordnance disposal officer. He had been trying to pull a pile of missiles away from the burning aircraft. Then he noticed several live bombs on the deck. He ran up to one 750-pound monster and coolly unscrewed its fuse; he did the same thing with a 500-pound bomb. "They'd been burning, and they were just lying there smoking," Cates recalls. "My job gets a little more sensitive with heat."

Down in Damage Control Central, Merv Rowland was feeling a little better. Seven bombs had exploded, but none in the past 15 minutes. The flight-deck crews were succeeding in keeping the fire aft. The destroyers *Rupertus* and *G. K. McKenzie* had pulled to within a few feet of the *Forrestal*'s stern; their crews were hosing thousands of additional gallons of foam on the blaze. Even more important, new reports indicated that the threatened aft magazines did not contain munitions after all. Somehow the order to flood them had not been carried out—and now there would be no need. The danger of the ship's sinking was not as great as Rowland had supposed. Not as great, but still worrisome.

Just below the *Forrestal*'s flight deck are three cavernous hangar bays, and on this morning they were crowded with aircraft armed and ready to be hoisted above for the next strike. Already the flames had reached into the jet shop at the aft end of Hangar Bay 3. The problem was to keep them from spreading. The two-foot-thick steel doors that separate the bays from each other had been slammed shut. But the smoke was still so thick that, even with lanterns, repair-party members could not see the aircraft only

inches in front of them. They had to disarm the missiles by feel.

At 11:52—one hour after it started—the fire on the flight deck was under control. At 12:15 it was out. Other fires, however, still raged belowdecks and in the catwalks and passageways.

Down in the crowded sick bay, help was arriving at last. Navy and Air Force helicopters had landed with doctors and corpsmen from the *Oriskany*, the *Bon Homme Richard* and the Australian frigate *Hobart*. Now they were transferring dozens of casualties to operating rooms on other ships.

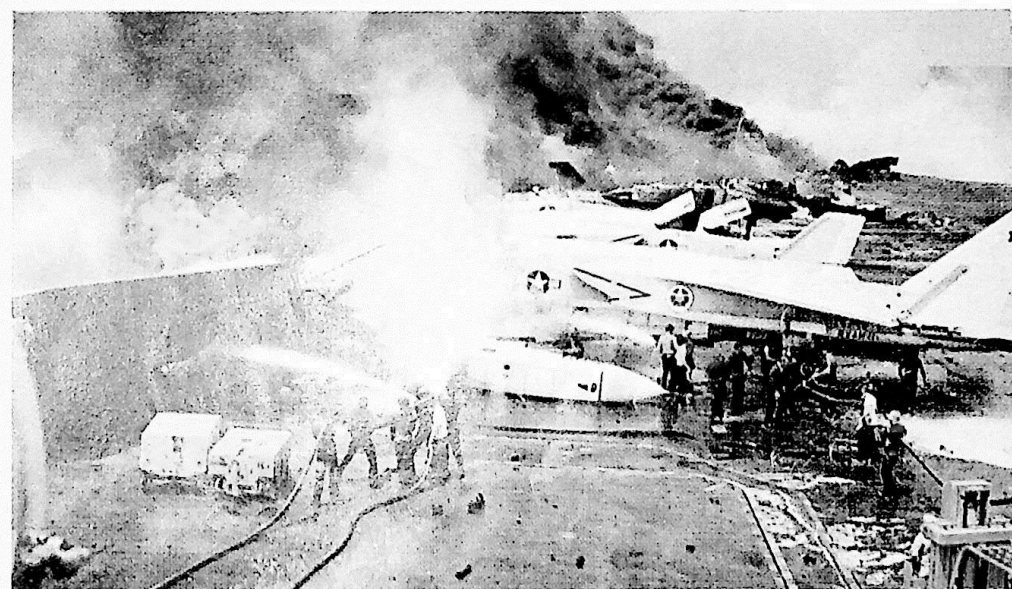
At 5:05 that afternoon, Captain Beling ordered a muster of all personnel. Sixty-seven officers and men were known to be dead already; 64 were wounded. And 70 were missing. Most of those were highly skilled technicians—members of the "night-check"

life among you, but only of the ship."

A temporary morgue had been set up in Hangar Bay 1, and Sam Mowad was trying to identify the dead. As a dentist, he spent most of his time looking at cavities, and he had concluded long ago that *all* American sailors had bad teeth. Now he was surprised to find how few of these men had fillings. He had no records on them.

The long-awaited announcement came from the bridge at 20 minutes past midnight: All the fires were out. But they could still flare up again at any time. The fire-fighting crews remained at their stations.

Dawn. The *Forrestal* was steaming toward the giant U.S. Naval Base at Subic Bay in the Philippines. On the flight deck, clean-up crews began to rake away the rubble. Down in officers' country, a young lieutenant sat on the



Pressing almost unbearably close to the flames, fire fighters strive to contain the disaster.

maintenance crews—who had been sleeping on the 03 level just below the aft flight deck when the first bomb exploded. Rescue parties could not go after them yet; fires on the 03 level were still burning too fiercely.

Night fell. The air was humid and thick, and the stench of death permeated the ship. Finally the rescue parties—battle lanterns in hand—set out upon their mission. The passageways on the 03 level were so twisted and charred and cluttered with debris that men could not move through them. They had to cut access holes in the flight deck with acetylene torches.

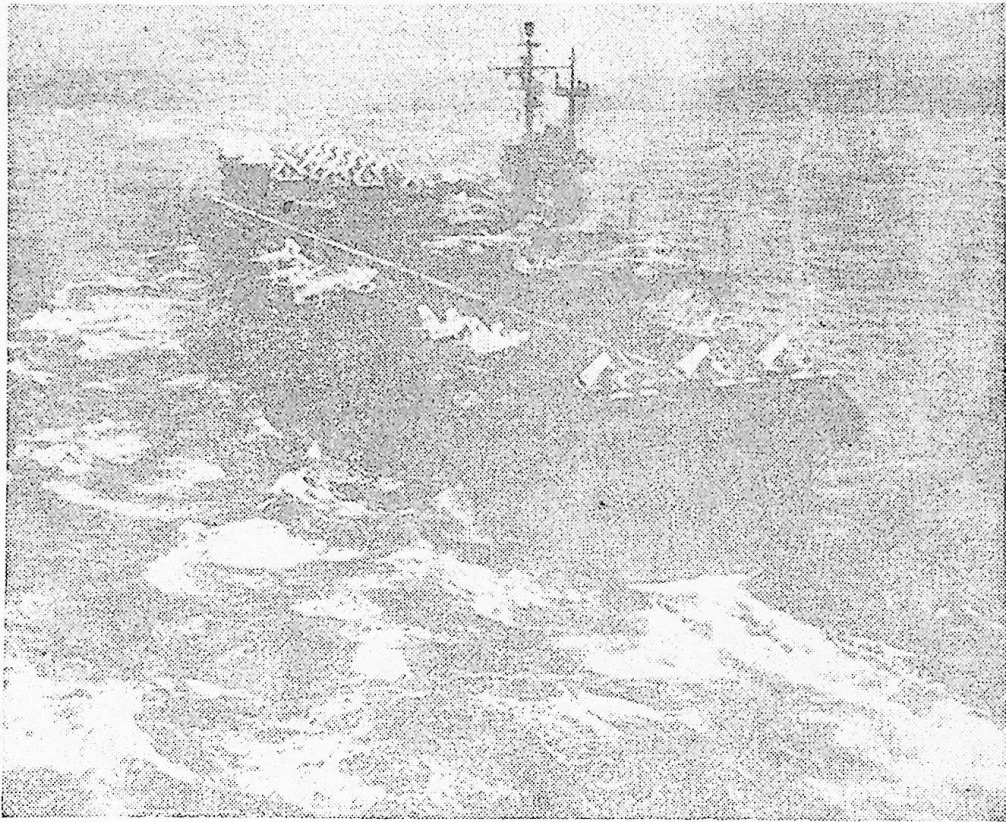
The rescue operation was slow and grisly. Marine Capt. Robert Snowden remembers watching one young sailor tug at a body, then faint as the man's head came off in his hands. Some of the victims had had time only to put on one shoe. At the first explosion, a father whose living quarters were forward rushed to the 03 level to try to save his stepson. The stepson's body was draped over the father's. In another smoking compartment, rescue workers found a wet Bible on a table. It was opened to Acts, 27:22: "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's

deck beside the door to his cabin. He was still wearing the drenched and blackened khakis he had put on 24 hours before, but he was too tired to go inside and change clothes. He shook his head slowly. "Things like this just don't happen to us," he said. "It still seems too unreal."

On August 11 the *Forrestal* began her long voyage home to Norfolk. A team of naval experts sifted through the wreckage to pinpoint the cause of the fire. Already they know that a "flying object"—presumably a Sidewinder missile or a five-inch Zuni rocket—"left the rails" of an F-4 Phantom, shot across the flight deck, punctured the external tank of an A-4 Skyhawk and ignited 300 gallons of highly volatile fuel. At first they thought the missile might have been discharged by the extra-long flames of a jet's "wet" start. Now they are not so sure. Their search continues today. What was the flying object? How was it fired?

The gruesome ordeal has had an effect upon the men of the *Forrestal*. "A ship as large as this is like a city," says Lt. Gerry Paul. "Before the fire, it was very easy to walk by people in the passageways and never say hello. We don't do that any more." □

Deaths Unknown, 29 Planes Lost As Fire Sweeps Carrier Forrestal



USS FORRESTAL, 76,000-ton aircraft carrier on duty only five days off coast of North Vietnam, is ravaged by explosion and fire as fighter plane drops jet fuel tank upon being launched.

SAIGON (UPI).—A U. S. warplane's ruptured belly tank spewed tons of blazing jet fuel over the carrier Forrestal's deck today. Acres of flame trapped pilots in their cockpits and exploded bombs and rockets primed for momentary use against North Vietnam.

Military officials said an undetermined number of the 4400 officers and men aboard the 76,000-ton carrier were killed and at least 29 multi-million dollar warplanes destroyed in the four-hour inferno.

Some crewmen reportedly leaped overboard to escape fiery death while others dashed through sizzling flames to save 2500-pound bombs from exploding.

"IN THE HOUR that followed the start of the fire I saw more heroic instances than I could count," said Read Adm. Harvey P. Lanham, commander of Carrier Division Two aboard the Forrestal.

He said sailors and crewmen hurled bombs, flaming fuel tanks and debris from jets into the Gulf of Tonkin 150 miles off the North Vietnamese coast where the 12-year-old carrier had been launching around-the-clock strikes against vital Communist targets.

The fire erupted at 10:53 A. M. (10:53 P. M. EDT Friday) while the Forrestal was swinging into a 35-mile-per-hour wind in preparation for launching a wave of its 60 to 90 jets toward North Vietnam.

A jet clustered among others awaiting takeoff on the top-level 4.1-acre flight deck burst its belly tank. The fuel flowed down a ramp for the steam catapults used to launch the warplanes and was ignited by the heat.

OFFICIALS SAID the wind-whipped flames roared into a holocaust in seconds, fully engulfing loaded planes with pilots at the controls and sloshing down to the hangar deck below where scores of other jets were parked wingtip to wingtip.

Sailors in asbestos suits plunged through the walls of fire to bring the blaze on the flight

Continued on Page 8

Local sailor on Forrestal when fire hit

(Editor's Note: The following paragraphs are some excerpts from a recent letter received by the parents of Seaman Tim Dornan, Mr. and Mrs. K. E. Dornan of 6410 Plum st NE, Louisville, from Tim's Commanding Officer, in which the CO tried to explain some of the heroism seen aboard the USS Forrestal after its recent fire.)



Tim M. Dornan

"... At 1050 that morning Forrestal was in the Gulf of Tonkin about sixty miles off the coast of North Vietnam. Aircraft were about to be launched for our second strike of the day and the ship was headed into the wind at a speed of 27 knots. The strike aircraft were spotted along either side of the after area of the flight deck, jet engines turning, pilots making their final checks and crewmembers around the aircraft checking the exteriors of the planes. Suddenly, for a reason not yet determined, the external fuel tank of an A-4 Skyhawk aircraft parked on the port side of the flight deck was struck by a flying object. The tank broke open and spewed forth volatile fuel which caught fire and spread through a line of aircraft. Fire Quarters was immediately sounded, followed in seconds by General Quarters. The men responded to the calls instantly as they have been trained to do. The reaction of many was heroic -- above and beyond the call of duty. For one example, a Chief Petty Officer, armed with only a CO2 bottle fire extinguisher, ran up to a bomb in the middle of the fire, followed by men with fire hoses. Crewmembers, risking their lives, assisted pilots out of their aircraft. But then, the bomb which the Chief was attempting to cool, exploded, killing the Chief and a number of other men in the area. The exploding bomb ruptured more fuel tanks, additional bombs detonated, and the fire raged throughout the after areas of the ship.

In the very first minutes of

our tragedy, I realized how maligned the youth of America really is. By their valor, bravery and general unconcern for their own lives, and their determination to save the ship, your men in Forrestal were examples of American youth at its best. To me, these are the finest men in the world. Words alone cannot describe their efforts and bravery in the face of danger and tragedy.

"... The men were at General Quarters for 26 hours and continued to work for another 24 hours. They were so ambitious we couldn't pass the word for 20 volunteers, because hundreds would answer the call. Exhausted, tired, yet filled with determination, we arrived in Subic Bay on Monday, July 31, for the shipyard experts to assess the damage. . . Thus enters the sole happy note in the tragic affair -- namely that our men will be reunited with their loved ones soon.

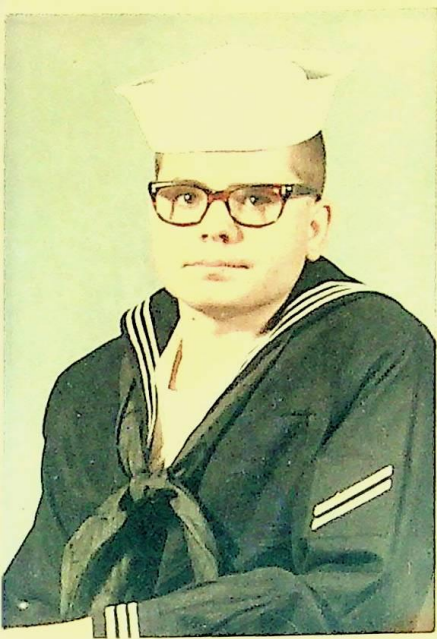
"... Had it not been for the extensive training, plus the diligence the men exhibited during training, the damage and loss of life aboard Forrestal would have been much higher. The men worked and fought fires in the most professional manner. For this outstanding performance, everyone is thankful and proud.

"One hundred thirty-two men lost their lives in the tragedy. Two men are missing without hope of recovery. Their sacrifices and those of their families were made for freedom. . . The men who died and those who were injured made their contribution for the cause of freedom around the world. . ."

John K. Beling, Captain, USN, Commanding Officer, was the writer of the Familygram.

its annual White Elephant Sale. Each member is asked to bring a guest, along with one new item and two old items for the sale.

Hostesses for the evening will be Mrs. Judy Baum, Mrs. Laura McLichock and Mrs. Virginia Miller. Subject of meditation will be presented by Mrs. Lillian Kandel. The surprise will be furnished by Mrs. Shirley Hayley, Mrs. Therese Weisend and Mrs. Barbara Snively.



The Saturday Evening Post · October 7, 1967 · 35c

POST

TV: WHAT'S NEW
THIS FALL
THE FORRESTAL
FIRE AT SEA
NOTRE DAME
FOOTBALL

SCHOOLBOOKS:
HOW THEY
SHAPE
YOUR CHILD'S
MIND

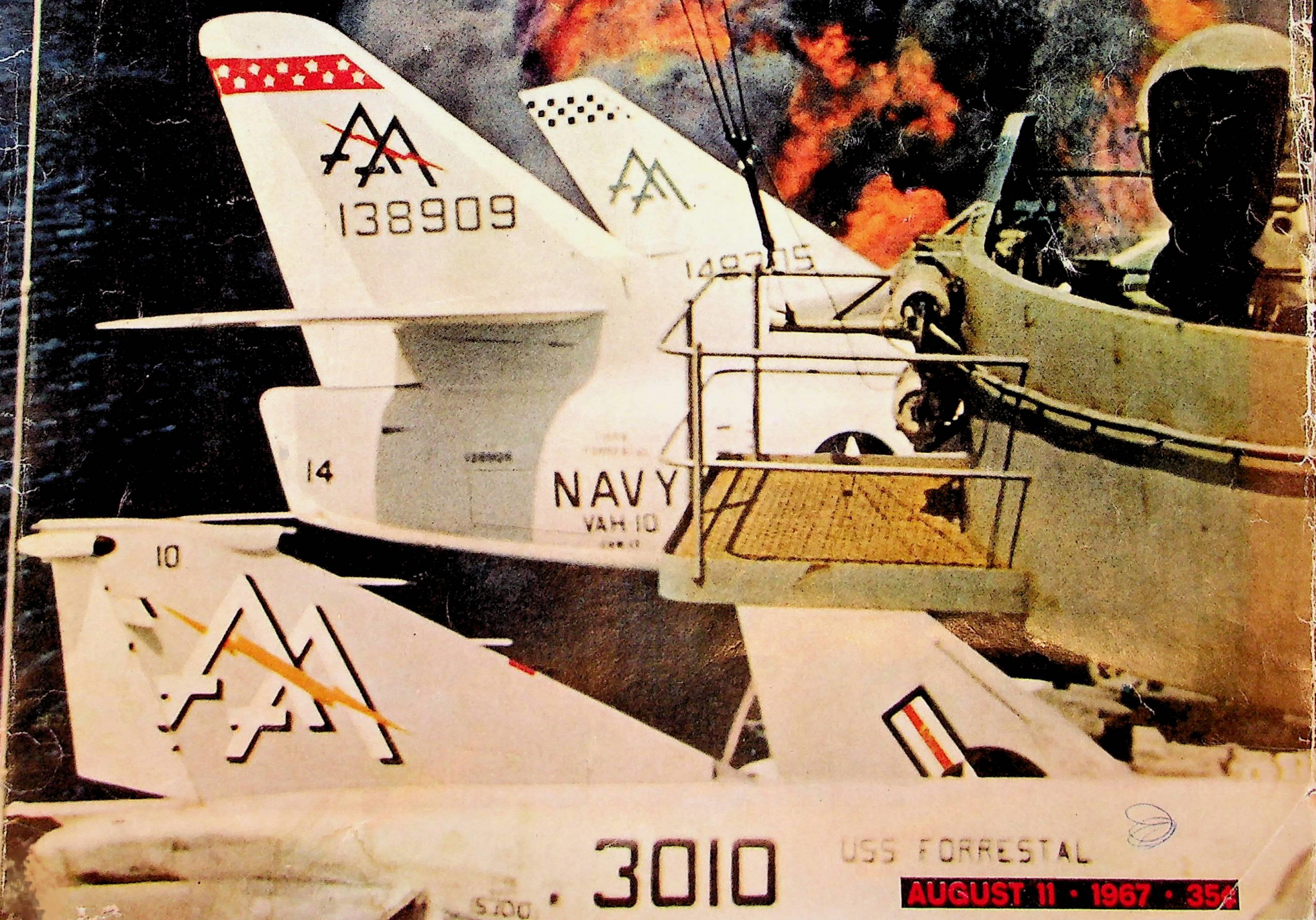


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LIFE

Forrestal Disaster

INFERNO AT SEA



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USS FORRESTAL

AUGUST 11 • 1967 • 35¢

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**LIFE**

Vol. 63, No. 6 August 11, 1967

HELL ABOARD CVA-59

In the Gulf of Tonkin, 150 miles off Vietnam, the inferno swept CVA-59—the mighty U.S.S. Forrestal. Moments before, a Skyhawk bomber, taking off on a mission against North Vietnam, had spewed flame in a “hot start,” probably caused by excess fuel. The flame struck a missile aboard an F-4 Phantom. The missile tore loose and struck the fuel tank of another plane. The fuel ignited and spilled over the deck, becoming a river of fire that vaporized steel and entered the bowels of the ship through holes ripped in the decks by explosions. With the carrier’s fate at stake and more than 130 shipmates already doomed, sailors (left) rushed to other rockets—which might explode any moment—to heave them over the side.

Minutes before the fire broke out, Lt. (j.g.) David Dollarhide, a 25-year-old Navy pilot from Jackson, Miss., stepped cheerfully from the briefing room aboard *Forrestal*. He had just heard good news: intelligence indicated he would encounter very little flak on his assigned sortie over North Vietnam. He remembers thinking, "What a piece of cake this day will be!"

Dollarhide climbed into his A-4 Skyhawk parked on the after section of the flight deck and began the routine preflight checkout of his craft. "Everything was normal," he says, "and I was ready to go with seven minutes remaining before launch at 11 a.m. Suddenly I heard a loud explosion on my right side. As I turned to look, flames were leaping toward me just level with my nose."

An instant later Dollarhide saw the mechanic assigned to his plane reeling backward through the fire, clutching his right arm which was nearly severed at the shoulder. Other crewmen rolled screaming on the deck in the rapidly spreading lake of flame. Still unaware of the extent of what was happening, Dollarhide unstrapped himself from the cockpit and stood up to jump. His foot caught on the canopy railing and he fell, breaking his right hip.

"I tried to get up and couldn't move," he says. "The flames were already under my right wing. I said, 'Pal, you've got to get out of here.' I saw my plane captain, Airman Joseph Patane, headed across the deck into the fire to help me."

Patane, a 19-year-old mechanic from Monroeville, N.J., hoisted Dollarhide and started away from the fire. Patane was struck by shell fragments in the head and foot. Dollarhide took bits of steel in his right foot and left hip.

Such was the beginning of a day of horror surpassing anything Dollarhide or any other of the 5,003 men on the ship had ever known. But the thing that was to stand out in the minds of survivors was the memory of heroism—countless acts of bravery.

There was, for example, the desperate action attempted by Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate Gerald F. Farrier of Batesville, Ark., who grabbed a fire extinguisher and walked directly into the flame, spraying a path ahead of him. He was trying to reach a bomb at which a tongue of flame was already licking. It detonated right in front of him.

"That was the bravest thing I ever saw," said Lt. Commander

John S. McCain III, who had been seated in another plane directly aft of Lieutenant Dollarhide's. McCain, whose father is commanding chief of U.S. naval forces in Europe, jumped from the cockpit, ran through a wall of flame and started helping sailors on the hangar deck who were pushing bombs and missiles over the side of the ship. There they were joined by Lt. Commander Herbert A. Hope, whose plane had been farthest aft on the port side, the section of *Forrestal* where the damage was greatest. "There was no panic," Hope said. "A lot of people looked confused like they wondered what in hell was going on, but in five minutes everyone on this ship became a man. There wasn't a punk kid to be found anywhere." He recalled how even men already lacerated with wounds fought to be released to get back to fire fighting. Others, more seriously wounded, asked only for morphine to still their pain. One young mechanic, whose arm was nearly gone, pleaded not to have the arm amputated. He died before the decision had to be made.

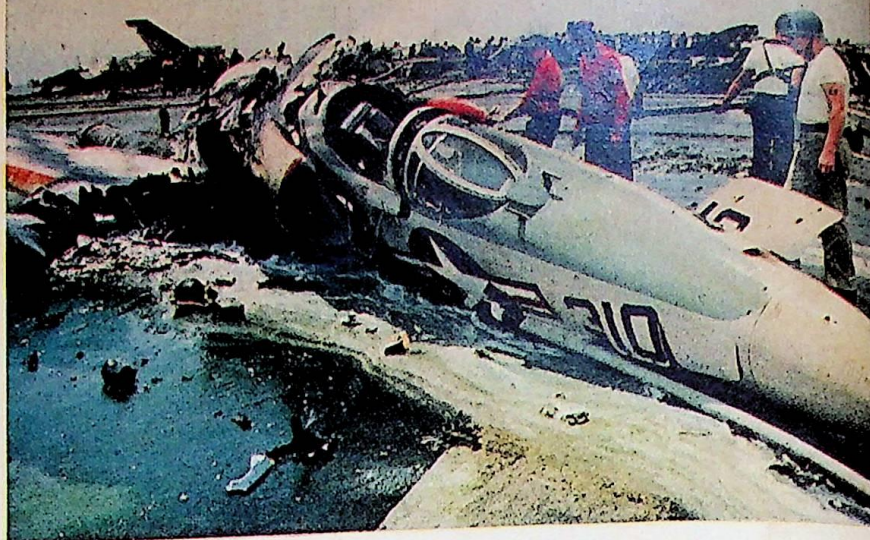
Lt. (j.g.) Robert Cates, the ordnance disposal officer, joined the group of men who were throwing bombs over the side. "When I didn't get hit by the first bomb detonation," he says, "I figured it wasn't my day to die." Cates later walked out on the flight deck and unscrewed the fuse on two smoking bombs that had been blown clear of their planes.

It wasn't Lonnie Black's day to die, either. A seaman in Cates's ordnance disposal team, Petty Officer 2/C Black allowed himself to be lowered by rope into a hole blown in the flight deck to defuse a 500-pound bomb. He lived.

Or consider Lt. Otis Kight, who is a computer specialist from Oklahoma. Kight's feat may be the most astonishing of any wrought that terrible day. With a strength born of crisis, he picked up a 250-pound fully armed bomb and dropped it into the sea. Kight weighs 130 pounds.

Later, one of the wounded seamen was asked how it was possible that the ship had been saved from total destruction. He pondered the question for a moment and then said quietly: "It was prayer, prayer and work, prayer and work." Then, perhaps remembering the close friends lost in the disaster, he added, "And one more thing, sacrifice."

HAL WINGO



'IN 5 MINUTES EVERYONE ON THIS SHIP BECAME A MAN'



After a 10-hour struggle, though small fires still burned in compartments below, the crew had managed to extinguish flames enveloping the after flight deck, and the *Forrestal*

was saved. At upper left, sailors inspect the debris of a Skyhawk bomber. Above, fire fighters past the point of exhaustion slump for a break on the deck. Below, other members of

the crew carry the dead and injured to helicopters landing from Danang and from the carriers *Bon Homme Richard* and *Oriskany*. The ships were part of a task force operating

in the so-called Yankee Station off North Vietnam. The *Oriskany* herself was devastated by a fire nine months ago (LIFE, Nov. 25, 1966) which caused the death of 43 men.





The detonation of rockets and 750-lb. bombs blew huge, jagged holes in the flight deck. In minutes the flames spilled down through six other decks, twisting and collapsing bulkheads and trapping scores of

men. The crew trained hoses into the holes, pouring tons of water below. Here, while friends grasp them to keep them from falling in, the survivors peer into a crater in the deck in a search for the dead.



At last the inferno had subsided, leaving the Forrestal's after flight deck strewn with the rubble of two thirds of her complement of 80 planes. Below, bearing many of her wounded and her dead, Forrestal

limps off for a rendezvous with the hospital ship Repose before heading on to the U.S. naval base at Subic Bay in the Philippines for temporary repairs. She will be out of action for at least six months.

