

HISTORY OF THE USS ORISKANY

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Oriskany

A village in central New York state and the scene of one of the bloodiest battles of the Revolutionary War. During the Saratoga campaign in the summer of 1777, a British force invested Fort Stanwix in central New York, intending to seize control of the Mowhawk Valley and guard the left flank of the British advance on Albany. On 4 August 1777, a relief column of some 800 Tryon County militiamen and 40 Oneida warriors under Brigadier General Nicholas Herkimer and Chief Skenandoah set out from Fort Dayton, some forty miles to the east. Two days later, as the Tryon militia entered the marshy ravine of Oriskany Creek, a smaller force of Tories, Mohawks and Senecas under Sir John Johnson, Col. John Butler and Chief Joseph Brant ambushed the patriot militia. Initially thrown into disorder and suffering heavy losses, Herkimer's force regrouped on higher ground and fought a bitter six hour battle against the Loyalists, marked by hand-to-hand combat with bayonets and tomahawks. Losses at Oriskany were severe and both sides withdrew, with American losses amounting to half the original force, including General Herkimer who died of his wounds a week later. Although the patriots did not then relieve Fort Stanwix, a second expedition forced the British force to lift the siege and retreat to Canada, contributing to British General John Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga in October.

The name *Oriskany*, assigned to CV-18, 28 December 1940, was changed to [Wasp](#) 26 September 1942.

(CV-34: displacement 27,100 tons; length 888'; beam 147'6" (extreme width); draft 31'; speed 33 knots; complement 3,460; armament 8 5-inch guns, 14 3-inch guns, 80 aircraft; class *Oriskany*)

Oriskany (CV-34), an attack aircraft carrier, was laid down 1 May 1944 by the New York Naval Shipyard; launched 13 October 1945; and sponsored by Mrs. Ida D. Cannon, wife of the Honorable Clarence Cannon, Congressman of the 9th District of Missouri. Owing to the end of the war and shrinking budgets her construction was suspended 12 August 1947. She remained in a state of preservation until after the outbreak of hostilities in Korea in June 1950, then rushed to completion. She commissioned in the New York Naval Shipyard 25 September 1950, Capt. Percy H. Lyon in command.

After fitting out, *Oriskany* departed New York 6 December 1950 for two weeks of flight deck qualifications for Douglas AD *Skyraider* attack aircraft in Carrier Air Group (CVG) One, followed by a stop at Newport, R.I., for a Christmas call. The carrier sailed south in early January for flight operations with jet aircraft off Jacksonville, Fla., and to the West Indies for shakedown evolutions out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. After returning north to her new home port at Quonset Point, R.I., she steamed to Brooklyn for post-shakedown modifications at the New York Naval Shipyard between 6 March through 2 April.

Oriskany departed Quonset Point on 15 May 1951 for a Mediterranean deployment with CVG-4 embarked. Chopping to 6th Fleet near Gibraltar, the aircraft carrier relieved *Saipan* (CVL-48) at Augusta Bay, Sicily, on 7 May. Over the course of the summer, the warship cruised throughout the Mediterranean, visiting ports ranging from Cannes and Golfe Juan, France, in the west and Izmir, Turkey, in the east. She also stopped at ports in Italy and Greece as well as visiting Tripoli

in Libya, which was still under British administration while the United Nations worked to establish an independent Kingdom there. During this cruise *Oriskany* participated in Operation Beehive, a joint North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) exercise with French, British and American forces. Highlights of this operation included supporting an amphibious landing exercise at Malta and a flyover by a British De Havilland 100 *Vampire* jet fighter.

Oriskany returned to Quonset Point on 4 October 1951 and, after a month of post-deployment leave and upkeep, sailed west to Gravesend Bay, New York, to offload ammunition and to have her masts removed to allow passage under the East River Bridges. Entering the New York Naval Shipyard in mid-November, the aircraft carrier underwent her first major overhaul. Yard work included the installation of a new flight deck to make it easier to operate jet aircraft and modifications to the steering system and bridge layout. Work was complete by 15 May 1952 and the carrier put to sea the next day to take on ammunition at Norfolk 19-22 May. She then got underway to join the Pacific Fleet, steaming via Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Valparaiso, Chile; and Lima, Peru; before arriving at her new home port at San Diego, Calif. on 21 July. During this transit, *Oriskany* received a visit from Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas on 20 June during a stop at Rio de Janeiro and, on 29 June, became the first American aircraft carrier to sail around Cape Horn. According to the *Oriskany* cruise book, the warship, after turning north along the coast of Chile, steamed through seas so rough that the crew had to sit on the mess hall decks to eat.

After settling in to her new home port at San Diego, and receiving repairs and maintenance at San Francisco and Long Beach Naval Shipyards that summer, *Oriskany* conducted carrier qualifications for CVG-102. The Air Group, comprised of two fighter squadrons equipped with Grumman F9F *Panther* jets, a third fighter squadron with Vought F4U *Corsairs*, an attack squadron with Douglas AD *Skyraiders* and a Sikorsky HO3S helicopter squadron, was preparing to join the carrier for a combat deployment to Korea. *Oriskany* also embarked detachments from four composite squadrons, including photo reconnaissance aircraft and F4U night fighters. In the middle of these evolutions, the warship received a visit from King Faisal II of Iraq, who was on a tour of the United States, and Vice Admiral Harold M. Martin, Commander Air Forces, Pacific Fleet.

Oriskany got underway from San Diego on 15 September 1952 and sailed for the combat zone. Just over a week later, during routine flight operations, a *Skyraider* from VA-923 suffered a mechanical failure forcing Lt(jg) Allan H. Gunderson to ditch his aircraft at sea. He was promptly rescued by a Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopter flown by Lt(jg) Bernard W. Taylor and Airmen J. W. Mills from the HU-1 detachment. During the transit *Oriskany* was also redesignated an attack aircraft carrier (CVA) on 1 October 1952, a Navy-wide change intended to mark the distinction between anti-submarine carriers (CVS) and the attack versions. She arrived at Yokosuka, Japan, on 17 October. Following operational briefings and other preparations, the aircraft carrier joined *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA-31) and the rest of Task Force 77 off the east coast of Korea on 31 October.

After a few days of familiarization, *Oriskany* commenced combat operations on 2 November 1952. Owing to the shorter range of her jet aircraft, combat sorties were split between two general target areas, with the piston-engine *Corsairs* and *Skyraiders* attacking supply areas near Pyongyang, North Korea, and the *Panthers* conducted bombing and strafing reconnaissance runs

along the east coast north of Wonsan. The focus of attack operations for her first line period was close air support to front line combat forces, interdiction of enemy supply lines and air support for naval gunfire strikes along the coast. Although poor weather cancelled flights for four days in the middle of November, and she held three other replenishment days, *Oriskany* flew a total of eleven days of combat missions over her two and half weeks on the line.

Highlights of her operations included "night heckler" missions, with fighter and attack aircraft strafing and bombing communist truck convoys, air strikes on enemy front line positions, and multiple road and bridge cuts near Yangdok. The most dramatic moment occurred on the afternoon of 18 November 1952, when four *Oriskany Panthers* on routine combat air patrol (CAP) over TF 77 were vectored to intercept seven enemy MiG-15 swept-wing jet fighters detected by radar. In the resulting fifteen-minute melee, the *Panthers* shot down two enemy MiGs and damaged two others, with Lt. Royce Williams and Lt (jg). John Middleton from VF-781 receiving credit for the victories. The action was the first multi-jet aerial dogfight by Navy aircraft, and it illustrated the importance of training and experience. These combat operations were not cost free, however, with the Air Group losing two aircraft in combat and four others damaged by ground fire. The first loss took place on 4 November, when VA-923 pilot Ensign Andrew L. Riker's *Skyraider* was shot down by ground fire south of Wonsan. A second VA-923 pilot, Lt. George A. Gaudette, was killed on 15 November when his AD-3 spun out during a bombing run and crashed into a mountain side. The flight deck gang suffered a death as well on 5 November, when Airmen John M. Guldhorn slipped and fell under the wheels of an F4U *Corsair* and was killed.

Returning to Yokosuka on 19 November 1952, the aircraft carrier spent the next two weeks repairing and maintaining the warship and embarked aircraft and loading supplies and ammunition for another line period. *Oriskany* resumed combat operations on 4 December with strikes near Pyongyang, an evolution that saw one *Skyraider* severely damaged by anti-aircraft fire. The pilot, Ensign Willis E. Radebaugh of VA-923, managed to keep the plane aloft until back over friendly territory and parachuted to safety. Two days later another pilot ditched at sea off Hungnam after his *Corsair* was damaged by ground fire. Lt. William P. Hughes, VF-874, was rescued by a small boat from *Rooks* (DD-804) after spending about forty-five minutes in a life raft. Air attacks during the first week on station included supply dumps, trucks, rail cars and dock facilities near Pyongyang, Wonsan and Sinpo. After replenishment on 7 December, the campaign against North Korean railroads continued along the northern coast of the peninsula, with box cars strafed and bridges and rail lines cut near Hungnam and Hyesanjin, the latter city near the Manchurian border. In the midst of combat operations on 9 December, *Oriskany* also received a visit from Capt. James A. Van Zandt, USNR, member of the House of Representatives from the 22d district of Pennsylvania and a member of the Armed Services Committee. After replenishing again on the 11th, the air group spent three days pounding targets near the frontline near Kilchu, helping to relieve pressure on friendly ground forces in the area. On 16 December, despite abysmal weather, the entire air group conducted a major strike on railroad facilities at Hyesanjin. The campaign against North Korean supply lines along the east coast continued for another week, with many strikes rewarded by numerous secondary explosions. VA-923 lost a third pilot, however, when LT(jg) James A. Hudson's *Skyraider* failed to pull out of a near vertical dive and crashed near Songjin. The intensity of the campaign was also illustrated by the thirteen additional planes damaged by ground fire. *Oriskany* returned to Yokosuka on 27 December.

The warship carried out a third line period beginning on 10 January 1953. High seas and inclement weather prohibited combat operations for the next four days and it was not until the 15th that *Oriskany* aircraft began attacking enemy targets. Over the next three days, jets and "props" bombed and strafed supply concentrations, enemy bivouac areas and logistic routes in the Wonsan area, teaming with two other aircraft carriers and surface forces for an all-out bombardment of the Wonsan area. Later in the month enemy positions were targeted up the east coast of North Korea, ranging as far north as Chongjin. Aircraft also targeted enemy trenches and gun positions near the front lines in support of friendly troops. On 26 January, a *Corsair* piloted by Ens. David L. Brenner was hit by ground fire and forced to ditch off Hungnam. Although suffering from shock and, as put by his rescuers, "an over-indulgence of sea water," he managed to get into the rescue sling and was successfully picked up by Lt. William W. Wear and 1st Lt. James W. Wood flying in a Sikorsky HO3S-1 from *Los Angeles* (CA-135). *Oriskany's* aircraft continued to pound enemy targets through the end of the month, though February began on a grim note when Cdr. John C. Micheel, Commander of VA-923, died in a *Skyraider* crash on the 1st after enemy ground fire sheered off a wing of his aircraft. Two days later a second pilot ditched his aircraft, this time a *Panther* from VF-781 that put down in Wonsan harbor. The pilot was rescued by friendly boats. In the first week of February, aircraft began to focus on supply targets near the front lines, a task that continued until 11 February when *Oriskany* returned to Yokosuka. During the latter operations, the Air Group and component squadrons were all redesignated, with CVG-102 becoming CVG-12 and, for example, VA-923 becoming VA-125.

Following a brief upkeep period in Japan, *Oriskany* put to sea on 1 March 1953 for her fourth line period, Rear Admiral Robert F. Hickey, Commander, Carrier Division Five, embarked. The carrier began combat operations on 4 March 1953 with a small strike on a supply depot south of Wonsan. The next day *Oriskany* launched a major attack on Hungnam and a series of "heckler" and armed reconnaissance runs along the east coast. On the 6th, the "props" turned to bombing depots, trenches and bunkers south of Wonsan and near Hamsong. In the middle of these strikes one F4U piloted by Lt. Edwin L. Kummer, VF-124, developed engine trouble shortly after take off. Aborting the mission, Kummer tried but was unable to jettison all his ordnance, as one 250-pound bomb "hung-up" on the bomb rack. Hung ordnance was an infrequent but not unusual problem at that time and Kummer was given permission to land. Unfortunately, as his *Corsair* hit the deck, the general purpose bomb broke loose, bounced up the flight deck and exploded over the No. 3 elevator, killing two sailors and wounding fourteen others.

One of the men killed was Photographer Airman Thomas L. McGraw, killed while filming landing operations, while the other was Aviation Electrician Airman Thomas M. Yeager, who died working on a tied down *Panther*. The explosion riddled the hangar deck below with shrapnel, piercing many of the parked aircraft and flooding the hangar bay with gasoline. Firefighting teams quickly extinguished the fire and isolated the hangar deck, preventing the fire from spreading into the ship. At the same time, Airman Richard D. Donovan - then serving as "hotsuit man" - ran through the flames, cut the unconscious pilot from his harness and pulled him to safety. Damage repair crews put the aircraft carrier back in business within hours and *Oriskany* began launching airstrikes again on 8 March, targeting railroad tracks, bridges and facilities.

On the 13th, Ens. David B Place's *Skyraider* was damaged by ground fire near Kowan and he ditched in Wonsan harbor. He was rescued in less than 15 minutes by a Sikorsky HRS-2

helicopter crewed by Lt. Richard G. Brand and AD2 R. L. Welch from *LST-735*. Starting on the 16th, the air wing shifted attacks against enemy troop positions behind the front lines, demolishing trenches, gun positions and supply points. After a massive single day strike on Chongjin on 21 March, the air wing shifted back south to the front line, bombing supply and support areas. Tragedy struck on the 22d in the midst of these operations when an F9F-5 splashed into the water and burst into flames just after catapulting off the flight deck, killing Lt(jg) Ralph N. Mew. In between bouts of poor weather, CVG-12 pilots continued bombing enemy rail lines, troop concentrations and gun positions for the next week. The highlight of this phase of the deployment was a volunteer three-plane strike on 27 March against a heavily defended highway bridge south of Hamhung that demolished sixty yards of bridge at the center. Besides the two plane losses noted above, the toll on aircraft continued during this line period, with fifteen aircraft damaged by enemy ground fire and another that rolled overboard in rough seas.

On 29 March 1953, *Oriskany* turned south and sailed to Hong Kong for some well deserved rest and recreation. While the ship was enroute to that port on the 31st, a plane handler was accidentally blown overboard by a taxiing jet aircraft. Luckily, Lt(jg) Bernard W. Taylor, the pilot of the Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopter on plane guard station, spotted AN Joseph Sheppard fall into the water and the airmen was rescued in under a minute. Departing that port on 8 April, the warship returned to Korea and commenced her fifth tour on the line starting on the 11th. Air strikes focused on close air support missions in support of friendly ground troops, part of an intensifying United Nations' bombardment effort during the truce negotiations at Panmujon. Planes bombed and napalmed trenches, bunkers and gun positions. In between these operations the aircraft returned to Chongjin for logistical strikes and conducted target of opportunity attacks on enemy trains and trucks. On 13 April, a *Panther* from VF-122 suffered an engine flame out during a photo reconnaissance mission and tried to ditch at sea. The sea state was too rough, however, and LT(jg) Roy Taylor was killed when the plane broke apart on impact. A second F9F-5 was lost on 20 April when flak damage put the jet in an uncontrolled spin and it splashed into the sea, killing Ens. Randolph T. Scoggan, VF-121. Another nine aircraft were damaged by enemy ground fire. The 21st of April, the last day of the tour, was "Boy-san Day," when pilots got to select their own targets. Four pilots decided to return to the Hamhung highway bridge and successfully took down three complete sections following hits by six 1,000-pound bombs. Relieved by *Valley Forge* (CVA-45), *Oriskany* departed Korea on 22 April, touched at Yokosuka, and then sailed for home on 2 May, arriving at San Diego on 18 May.

Following voyage repairs and readiness training along the California coast that summer, *Oriskany* departed San Francisco on 14 September 1953 for her second cruise to the Far East, arriving at Yokosuka on 15 October. Although the Korean truce was holding, the atmosphere was anything but peaceful, with tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union running high. The Chinese communists were also on a hair trigger, as was attested by numerous attacks on American reconnaissance aircraft in the region. The aircraft carrier flew thousands of air patrol and routine training sorties over the winter as the warship patrolled in the Sea of Japan, the East China Sea, and in the Philippines. *Oriskany* also played host to various Hollywood notables filming *The Bridges at Toki-Ri*, including William Holden, Mickey Rooney, Frederick March and director Mark Robson. The ships' crew and airmen starred with the carrier as background for the film, and many played bit parts and crowd scenes. In March 1954, the aircraft carrier provided air support for Marine amphibious assault exercises at Iwo Jima, the largest such

operation since the close of the Korean War. During these evolutions, *Oriskany* crewmembers witnessed a spectacular jet crash on 31 March, when a McDonnell F2H-3 *Banshee* came in too low and crashed the beginning of the flight deck. Breaking in two, and enveloped in a huge fireball, the forward half of the jet careened across the deck, trailing fire and debris. Fire fighters got to the scene almost immediately and helped Lt. Frank J. Repp climb out of the cockpit without a scratch. Following the exercises off Iwo Jima, the aircraft carrier steamed for home.

Shortly after arriving in San Diego on 22 April 1954, *Oriskany* sailed north to the San Francisco Naval Shipyard for a six-month modernization overhaul. The yard work included the installation of a new jet fuel system, improved arresting and barricade gear for the flight deck and the usual equipment modifications and repairs. The aircraft carrier departed San Francisco on 22 October and spent the winter months on shakedown and refresher training evolutions off California. Upon completion she spent the holidays in her new home port of Alameda and commenced local operations. In February 1955, *Oriskany* "officially adopted" Alameda Girl Scout Troop 61, and volunteers from the crew helped refit and paint the troop sailboat, which was redesignated "Mariner Scout Ship No. 34" to coincide with *Oriskany's* hull number. In a more serious light, the aircraft carrier carried out qualifications for her aircraft squadrons in early March, following which she got underway for her third Far East deployment.

Arriving at Yokosuka on 2 April 1955, *Oriskany* operated with the Fast Carrier Task Force of 7th Fleet in the western Pacific, sailing in the South China Sea and waters off Japan and the Philippines. During the six weeks after her arrival in Japan, U.S. Navy ships finished up Operation "Passage to Freedom," the post-Geneva Accords evacuation of Vietnamese who did not wish to live in communist-controlled North Vietnam. Over the course of the ensuing summer, *Oriskany* flew thousands of sorties in support of overseas presence operations off China and visited widely in the Far East, including Hong Kong, Manila and ports in Japan and Okinawa. At the very end of the cruise, a PV2 *Neptune* reconnaissance plane from VP-19 based out of Japan was shot down by Soviet MiG fighters off the coast of Siberia. The aircraft successfully ditched and nine of ten crewmen were saved. Although tensions spiked immediately thereafter, it was not enough to keep *Oriskany* in the region and she sailed for home three days later, arriving at Alameda on 21 September. The aircraft carrier also won the coveted Battle Efficiency ("E") Award, having carried out a high tempo of operations with 5,978 sorties during this cruise.

Three days after arriving home, in a ceremony attended by the mayors of Alameda and Oakland as well as Congressman George P. Miller, 8th District of California, the crew presented Girl Scout Troop 61 with a new sailboat - a small sampan purchased in Hong Kong, painted a vivid red and black and equipped with a four-cylinder engine and even running lights! The little craft was christened by Congressman Miller, who broke a bottle of ginger ale across the sampan's bow.

Following voyage repairs and refresher training, the attack carrier carried out qualifications for the pilots of CVG-9 and other pre-deployment evolutions over the winter. She put to sea from Alameda on 11 February 1956 for her fourth western Pacific deployment. The cruise was relatively uneventful and *Oriskany* returned to San Francisco on 13 June to prepare for a major modernization program. As part of the Essex-class modernization program approved in May 1954, *Oriskany* entered San Francisco Naval Shipyard on 1 October, decommissioning there on

2 January 1957. Over the ensuing 26 months, shipyard workers stripped and completely rebuilt the flight deck to include an angled launch station, installed an enclosed hurricane bow, built a larger combat information center with much improved electronics and improved the crews' messing and living quarters. For part of the overhaul the ship moved north to Bremerton, Wash., where workers at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard installed newer, much more powerful steam catapults.

Oriskany recommissioned at the San Francisco Naval Shipyard on 7 March 1959, Capt. James M. Wright in command. Four days later she departed for shakedown out of her new home port of San Diego with Carrier Air Group 14 embarked. Refresher and familiarization operations continued along the west coast into the new year and it was not until 14 May 1960 that she again deployed to the western Pacific. International relations were tense owing to the successful Soviet shoot down of an American U2 flight two weeks previously, with the Chinese communist government ratcheting up tensions by releasing anti-American communiques and increasing shelling of Chinese Nationalist positions in the Taiwan Strait. Marked by a series of strike exercises near Japan and Okinawa, the deployment proved useful in familiarizing the crew with the newer, more powerful jet aircraft of CVG-14, as the warship embarked two fighter squadrons of McDonnell F3H-2 *Demon* jets, three attack squadrons of North American FJ-4B *Fury* jets as well as the workhorse AD-6 *Skyraider* piston-engine planes. The deployment lasted longer than usual and *Oriskany* did not return to San Diego until 15 December.

Following voyage repairs, she entered San Francisco Naval Shipyard 30 March 1961 for a five-month overhaul that included the first aircraft carrier installation of the Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS), which was intended to help collect, track and evaluate tactical data for the increasingly complex task of modern air combat. *Oriskany* departed the shipyard 9 September for underway training out of San Diego with CVG-16. Workups and refresher training continued into the new year and it was not until 7 June 1962 that she again deployed to the Far East. As in her previous deployment, the constant exercises and high-tempo operations familiarized the crew with new aircraft, this time LTV F-8A *Crusaders* and the Douglas A4D *Skyhawk*, the latter being the jet replacement for the venerable *Skyraider*. While in the Far East, the carrier also served as flagship for Rear Admiral Paul Masterson, Commander, Carrier Division One. *Oriskany* returned to San Diego on 17 December.

In addition to routine training the following spring, *Oriskany* also received a new aircraft landing system called the Pilot Landing Aid Television (PLAT), which filmed landings for review as a way to improve technique. In May 1963 the aircraft carrier also embarked new rescue helicopters, when a detachment of Kaman UH-2A *Sea Sprites* came onboard. The highlight of the summer, however, was on 6 June, when President John F. Kennedy visited the warship for an operational readiness demonstration. *Oriskany*, with CVG-16 embarked, stood out of San Diego on 1 August for her sixth Far East cruise, steaming to Subic Bay and thence to Iwakuni, Japan, by mid-month.

On 31 August, upon word of unrest brewing in South Vietnam, *Oriskany* stood out from Iwakuni and steamed to the South China Sea, arriving there after the coup d'etat that overthrew President Ngo Dinh Diem. The carrier remained off Vietnam, where VF-161 flew patrols in F3H *Demons*, until the end of November when *Oriskany* sailed to Yokosuka, Japan, for 18-days of yard availability. Following minor repairs there, the warship visited Sasebo, where the wing put on an

airshow for Vice Admiral Masao Yamashita, Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force. In January the carrier steamed south, visiting Hong Kong and Subic Bay, Philippines, before commencing training exercises in the South China Sea. On 12 February, the carriers' medical department came to the rescue of a sailor from *Pyro* (AE-59), who was suffering from a severe case of appendicitis. Transferred by highline in the middle of the night, *Oriskany* surgeons removed his appendix without incident. The operation was evidently a clear success, as the next morning the sailor asked to be transferred back to the ammunition ship so he wouldn't miss *Pyro*'s scheduled visit to Hong Kong. *Oriskany* returned to San Diego on 10 March 1964.

Following a four-month overhaul at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard that summer, during which the aircraft carrier received a new weapons loading system, a fresh coat of paint inside and the usual assortment of voyage repairs, *Oriskany* returned to San Diego for refresher training and qualifications for Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 16. While VA-152 squadron was equipped with the old familiar A-1 *Skyraider*, the two other squadrons – VA-163 and 164 – fielded jet-powered Douglas A-4 *Skyhawks*. The two fighter squadrons, VA-162 and VMF-212, were comprised of LTV F-8 *Crusaders*. Detachments of helicopters as well as reconnaissance and early warning aircraft filled out the air wing. During this period her flight deck was also used to test the Grumman E-2A *Hawkeye*, the Navy's new airborne early warning aircraft. The aircraft carrier also received visits from foreign military officers in the fall of 1964, with 14 students from the Amphibious Warfare School at Coronado, Calif., visiting the ship on 7 October and 80 officers from the Brazilian National War College observing air operations on 13 October. After a holiday stand down, the carrier resumed pre-deployment training in January 1965 that culminating in her participation in Exercise "Silver Lance," a large amphibious landing exercise carried out between 23 February and 8 March.

Oriskany departed San Diego on 5 April 1965 for her seventh Far East deployment, arriving at Subic Bay via Pearl Harbor on 27 April. From there the carrier sailed to the South China Sea where she joined two other carriers off the coast of Vietnam. Aircraft carriers had been off South Vietnam since early 1964, and had conducted retaliatory air strikes against the North Vietnamese communists at times that fall and winter. But after a series of attacks by communist Viet Cong guerillas on American forces in South Vietnam in early 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered both a troop buildup in the south and a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnamese military targets in the north. Elements of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade landed at Da Nang on 8 March, which began a major troop buildup in South Vietnam, and the aircraft carriers of Task Force 77 (TF 77) began their part in Operation "Rolling Thunder" a week later. Assigned to either "Yankee" or "Dixie" Stations, carriers in TF 77 launched aircraft for interdiction missions against North Vietnamese targets or conducted close air support against Viet Cong targets in the South.

Oriskany began her first line period on 8 May, mainly "in-country" missions over South Vietnam against Viet Cong positions in the central highlands but also seven days of strikes against enemy lines-of-communication in North Vietnam and Laos. The first operational loss of the cruise took place on 25 May, when a catapult bridle failure crushed the nose landing gear of an A-3B *Skywarrior* tanker, sending the aircraft over the side. The four crewmen ejected and, with the pilot LCdr. Richard B. Walls and Lt(jg) Gerald D. Adams suffering from broken legs, *Oriskany*'s plane guard *Sea Sprite* – commanded by Lt(jg) Woodrow W. Beck, piloted by Lt (jg) James R. Welsh and crewed by ATN3 Michael D. Wolack – dropped rescue diver AMS1 J. A. Garbutt to

help them into the rescue harness. The UH-2A picked up three of the crew, while the fourth was rescued by *Boyd* (DD-544). Following a short stop in Subic Bay 3-9 June, the carrier returned to “Dixie Station” for a week of on-call missions in the south. On the 18th she shifted north for two weeks of strikes from “Yankee Station,” interdicting the roads, bridges and rail lines feeding the “Ho Chi Minh” supply trail from Hanoi to Laos and south to Viet Cong supply depots in South Vietnam. These attacks introduced *Oriskany*’s airmen to the heavy anti-aircraft protection provided to North Vietnamese installations, particularly around key bridges and other transport nodes. A raid on the Nam Dinh fuel storage facility illustrated the dangers, with one aircraft severely damaged by flak. With enemy defenses quickly growing in strength – Soviet and Chinese anti-aircraft guns arrived in Hanoi by the hundreds every month – routine *Skyraider* operations in the north became too dangerous and VA-152 concentrated on rescue combat air patrol (ResCap) and armed reconnaissance missions to the south. As the *Skyriders* were equipped with APR-23 radar detection equipment, four planes were detached in June to help with pilot rescue operations out of Udorn, Thailand. A second operational loss took place on 30 June, when LCdr. Eric H. Schade, Jr.’s VA-152 *Skyraider* splashed after his catapult shot owing to engine failure. He escaped the plane and was picked up by *Perkins* (DD-877), who returned him to *Oriskany* “in exchange for 35 gallons of ice cream.” The first few weeks of July saw the carrier return to “in-country” operations in the south, lasting until the 18th when *Oriskany* sailed for Japan. Tragically, that day saw the first fatal operational loss, when Lt. Malcolm A. Avore’s VA-163 *Skyhawk* flamed out just after takeoff and splashed into the sea. Yet another VA-152 *Skyraider* was lost to engine failure on 21 July; the pilot successfully ditched about 10 miles from the aircraft carrier and was recovered by an *Oriskany* helicopter.

Following arrival in Yokosuka on 24 July 1965, *Oriskany* underwent a short refit before getting underway on 5 August to return to the war zone. Combat missions began on 10 August with strikes against heavily defended North Vietnamese barracks complexes; the days fatal loss coming not from ground fire but mechanical failure when Lt(jg) Lawrence S. Mailhes’ VA-152 *Skyraider* splashed in the Tonkin Gulf. Owing to frequently poor weather, the air wing flew mostly armed reconnaissance and interdiction missions that month with major strikes planned for breaks in the weather. One such strike was the attack on a suspected Surface to Air missile (SAM) site at Kep northeast of Hanoi, whose heavy defenses damaged three jets in mid-August. It was a preview of things to come. The first combat loss for the air wing took place on 26 August, when Lt (jg) Edward A. Davis’ *Skyraider* was hit by ground fire after making a rocket attack near Loc Xa. Davis bailed out and was captured by the North Vietnamese. The first pilot killed in action took place on 29 August during a ResCap mission. Lt. Edd D. Taylor, flying a *Skyraider* in a tight search pattern after receiving signals from an Air Force emergency beacon, was killed after his plane took heavy automatic weapons fire and crashed into a ridge line. A second loss took place that same afternoon, when Lt. Henry S. McWhorter was killed after his VFP-63 (Det G) *Crusader* was hit by 30mm anti-aircraft gun fire.

An increasing focus on finding enemy SA-2 Guideline SAM sites – part of Operation “Iron Hand” – meant even more sorties against heavily defended locations in September 1965. During a strike on the primary North Vietnamese truck route along Rte 1A at Ha Tinh on 6 Sep, heavy ground fire damaged one *Skyhawk*, which landed safely on *Oriskany*, and set fire to another. Lt. James L. Burton managed to guide his burning *Skyhawk* out to sea and bailed out just before his jet exploded. He was recovered by an Air Force HU-16 and returned to the ship via Da Nang.

One of the most successful missions of the cruise took place two days later, when Cdr. James B. Stockdale, then commander of CVW-16, led a six-plane mission that found and destroyed an 18-truck convoy northeast of Thanh Hoa. During that strike, however, an RF-8A *Crusader* piloted by LT (jg) Robert D. Rudolph took heavy 37mm fire just after crossing the beach, caught fire and rolled inverted into a dive. Although his wingman did not see the plane crash, he did not see a parachute and the pilot was presumed killed. More bad news followed on 9 September when Cdr. Stockdale led a two-plane Snakeye bombing attack against enemy railroad equipment. Immediately after the bomb run Stockdale's *Skyhawk* took heavy damage and he bailed out, landing in a heavily populated area. Captured almost immediately, Cdr. Stockdale remained a prisoner of the North Vietnamese until 12 February 1973. *Oriskany* departed "Yankee Station" on 11 September and sailed to Subic Bay for repairs and then on to Hong Kong for rest and recreation.

Back on station on 30 September 1965, the air wing resumed interdiction strikes on North Vietnamese logistics routes. During one strike against bridges north of Hanoi on 5 October, an F-8E on barrier combat air patrol (BarCap) came under attack from two or three enemy SAM launchers. One of the "flying telephone poles" detonated aft of the *Crusader*, setting LT(jg) Robert F. Adams aircraft on fire. Adams turned seaward and ejected when "feet wet", and was rescued by a helicopter from *Galveston* (CLG-3). Two days later VA-163 strikes finally dropped the Vu Chau highway bridge. A second bridge, this time on the Dong Phuong highway north of Thanh Hoa, was destroyed on 9 October and, after two SAMs sailed overhead, the attackers inflicted heavy damage on the launch site. Continuing the anti-bridge campaign on 17 October, CVW-16 joined with planes from *Independence* (CVA-62) to launch a coordinated strike against the Thai Ngyen highway bridge near the Chinese border. Although no *Oriskany* planes were shot down, two *Independence* pilots bailed out over the target. Four *Skyriders* on ResCap tried to cover a helicopter rescue mission but heavy ground fire, including the firing of SA-2s, drove off the aircraft. In addition, a VMF-212 *Crusader* was lost owing to mechanical failure, but the pilot was rescued. The aircraft carrier then spent 19-27 October at Subic Bay and Hong Kong.

Returning to combat missions on 28 October 1965, *Oriskany*'s attack aircraft spent the next two and a half weeks of November mainly conducting armed reconnaissance and interdiction strikes, with the *Skyriders*' focused on ResCap missions. In between these routine activities, the air wing participated in six major strikes. In the first, an unusual "Iron Hand" mission, Lcdr. Trent R. Powers, Executive Officer of VA-164, flew a *Skyraider* to an Air Force base at Takhli, Thailand, on the 30th. There, he joined up with eight Air Force F-105D *Thunderchief* fighter bombers for a strike against enemy SAM sites north of Hanoi. As his *Skyraider* was equipped with the APR-23, and the Air Force "Thuds" were not, Powers acted as pathfinder for the mission launched on the 31st. Arriving in the target area, the jets and the single piston aircraft attracted a flurry of enemy SA-2s before diving on the target. The "flying telephone poles" all missed, but heavy flak cut Powers' *Skyraider* into pieces as he attacked. Somehow he survived and other pilots witnessed a good chute as he floated down into enemy captivity. Lcdr. Powers later died in enemy hands and his body was not returned until 25 September 1987. On 5 November, the attack squadrons tried to blow the Hai Duong rail road bridge east of Hanoi. The strike failed, costing VMF-212 one aircraft piloted by Capt. Harlan P. Chapman who parachuted to earth and was captured after his F-8E took heavy 57mm anti-aircraft fire. Two days later the attack squadrons successfully attacked their nemesis, SAM batteries near Nam Dinh, but lost a

VA-152 *Skyhawk* in the process. Luckily, Lcdr. Charles G. Wack managed to get his burning jet over the sea and parachuted to safety. He was picked up by an Air Force HU-16 helicopter.

The toll on men and planes continued, with another VA-152 *Skyraider* lost on the night of 9 November 1965 when LCDR Paul G. Merchants' aircraft lost engine oil pressure owing to small arms fire while on an armed reconnaissance mission. He turned for the beach but the engine stalled enroute and he glided across the shoreline before safely ditching in the Tonkin Gulf. Lcdr. Merchant was then rescued by a UH-2 helo from *Gridley* (DLG-21). By 10 November, poor weather socked in the entire region and the air wing only managed two days of combat flights over the next week, although both proved deadly. On the 13th, during an armed reconnaissance mission, Cdr. Harry T. Jenkins *Skyhawk* from VA-163 burned after taking anti-aircraft fire; though he managed to parachute safely to the ground he was quickly captured. Four days later, during a repeat attack on the Hai Duong bridge, the air wing lost four aircraft, the worst day for CVW-16 during the whole cruise. First, while crossing the beach, a *Crusader* from VMF-212 lost electrical power after being hit by 37mm anti-aircraft fire. The pilot, Capt. Ross C. Chaimson, flew back to "Yankee Station" and ejected safely. He was rescued by a UH-2 helicopter from *Bon Homme Richard*. During the attack, an A-4E from VA-163 lost its right wing stabilizer to 37mm ground fire and Lcdr. Roy H. Bowling ejected, only to be captured shortly thereafter. Then, a VA-152 *Skyraider* on ResCap over Bowlings' crash site was set on fire by enemy small arms. Lcdr. Jesse J. Taylor tried to ditch at sea but the plane exploded about 3 miles offshore and he was killed. Finally, VMF-212 lost a *Crusader* to mechanical failure though the pilot was recovered safely. The "ResCap" *Skyriders* remained busy in early November, providing air cover for the successful rescue of seven Air Force and Navy pilots. One *Skyraider* even got credit for sinking a North Vietnamese junk that was trying to capture a downed pilot. Flying such close air support was also dangerous, and over half-a-dozen "Spads" were badly shot up, two crash landing "wheels up" at Da Nanag and a third, flown by Cdr. Albert E. Knutson, commander of VA-152, took 26 anti-aircraft bullet and shell hits during an unsuccessful rescue attempt on 13 November. A final strike by CVW-16 took place on 25 November and, as put by the command history for VA-163, "To everyone's great relief, the last strike of the cruise was a milk run."

In combat operations that brought *Oriskany* and embarked CVW-16 the Navy Unit Commendation for exceptionally meritorious service between 10 May and 6 December 1965, the aircraft carrier conducted over 12,000 combat sorties – a record never achieved before by any carrier during a single combat deployment – and delivered nearly 10,000 tons of ordnance against enemy forces. The air wing also racked up some impressive pilot statistics, with Cdr. Knutson from VA-152 flying 116 combat missions during his tour. The cost was heavy, with 22 planes lost in combat or accident and six pilots killed and another six made prisoner. After a short stop for a badly needed rest and minor repairs, *Oriskany* departed Subic Bay on 30 November and returned to San Diego on 6 December.

Following leave and upkeep, and after a period of restricted availability at NAS North Island between 3 January and 28 February 1966, *Oriskany* conducted refresher training with the Fleet Training Group, San Diego, in March. Pre-deployment readiness evaluations and exercises followed in April, including carrier qualifications with CVW-16. The air wing squadrons were the same as the 1965 cruise except for the Marine Squadron, which was replaced by VF-111.

Oriskany again stood out of San Diego for the Far East on 26 May 1966, stopping at Pearl Harbor for an air wing exercise in early June. While enroute to Japan the following week, CVW-16 aircraft intercepted three Soviet Bison bombers and kept them under surveillance as they flew near Guam. Following a liberty stop in Yokosuka starting on 14 June, *Oriskany* got underway on the 20th, steaming south to Subic Bay to finish in chop before arriving on “Dixie Station” off South Vietnam on 30 June.

The first eight days of strikes focused on “in-country” strikes in the south, coordinating their attacks on Viet Cong camps and supply caches as directed by special operations personnel. On 8 July 1966 the aircraft carrier moved north to Yankee Station, beginning interdiction strikes into the more heavily defended north. During the first major attack on 12 July, a strike on the Dong Nahn fuel storage area north of Hanoi, the *Skyhawks* of VA-163 and 164 bombed and destroyed two large storage tanks and fired *Shrike* anti-radar missiles at nearby SAM sites. One of the overhead *Crusaders*, piloted by Lt(jg) Robert F. Adams of VF-162, caught fire after being hit by ground fire and he bailed out over rough jungle terrain. Four *Skyraiders* on ResCap, vectored in by Adams’ wingman, suppressed nearby enemy ground troops enough for an SH-3 *Sea King* helicopter from HS-6 – piloted by Lt. William Waechter – to arrive overhead, drop a “jungle penetrator” line through the trees and pull the pilot to safety. Adams later said “It was kind of a rough ride up through the trees but I was more than happy to accept the few bruises I got than to sit on the ground and enjoy the not so pleasant possibilities...” Adams was the first Navy pilot in the war to be shot down and rescued twice, having first bailed out of a *Crusader* the previous October. Meanwhile, further south, *Skyhawks* dropped a span of the Xom Coi highway bridge and shot up barges in the river.

Two days later, during a strike on a rail yard near Nam Dinh on 14 July, the air wing had its first encounter with enemy fighter aircraft. A flight of three VF-162 F-8E *Crusaders* flying top cover for the strike were jumped by two MiG-17 *Fresco* fighters. In a brief duel, one jet on each side was damaged by enemy cannon fire and the crippled Navy F-8E, piloted by Cdr. Richard M. Bellinger, attempted to make Da Nang. Damage and lack of fuel forced him to eject some 40 miles out but he was quickly rescued by an Air Force helicopter. Interdiction and armed reconnaissance missions continued throughout the month, even as ground anti-aircraft intensity continued to grow. Navy pilots continued developing tactics to avoid flying into SAM envelopes, such as the technique of running in on targets at tree-top level – a risky tactic used during the 23 July *Skyhawk* raid on Dong Nhan, made even more dangerous by heavy thunderstorms. Four days later it was the turn of VA-152 to shine, when two *Skyraiders* – led by Lcdr. James O. Harmon – sortied to help rescue a downed Air Force pilot. Proceeding to the crash site near Dong Hoi, the “Spads” escorted an Air Force helicopter into the area, suppressing enemy small arms fire during the approach. Spotting the pilot, who was about to be captured, the two *Skyraiders* strafed nearby enemy positions until the helicopter could drop in and pick him up. On 28 July, during an “Iron Hand” mission, three *Skyhawk*’s from VA-164 detected a SAM radar emission and closed for a *Shrike* missile attack. Multiple SA-2 launches followed and Ens. George P. McSwain Jr.’s *Skyhawk* was mortally damaged. He survived bail out but was captured soon after. Two other aircraft were lost to ground fire during this line period and although both pilots survived, Lt. Terry A. Dennison’s of VF-162 was captured and later died in North Vietnamese custody. A third aircraft crashed during a night aerial refueling attempt on 29 July,

killing Lt(jg) Donovan L. Ewoldt. The aircraft carrier departed “Yankee Station” that same day and put in to Subic Bay for rest and upkeep 30 July to 3 August.

Returning to Yankee Station on 4 August, *Oriskany* began a month of combat operations starting on the 7th. In what was by now normal routine, the first few days of missions were invariably armed reconnaissance and other “warm up” strikes. Unfortunately the line period began badly, when Lt. Charles L. Fryer’s *Skyraider* took heavy ground fire while attacking a train near Qui Vinh. Damaged and on fire the plane crashed in the water off Cape Bouton, killing the Lieutenant. Another reconnaissance mission over various coastal islands cost another aircraft on 11 August, a VF-111 *Crusader* piloted by Ltjg. Cody A. Balister, that splashed owing to hydraulic failure. The pilot ejected safely and was picked up from an island by an SH-3 helicopter from *Chicago* (CG-11). The first large air strike took place that same day, with a successful 14-plane attack on the Giong POL storage area. Two days later, an 8-plane night strike hit river traffic near Hon Gay, setting close to a dozen fuel barges on fire and sinking two enemy PT Boats by the light from the flames. During one attack run on a barge a VF-111 *Crusader* piloted by Lcdr. Norman S. Levy caught fire. The pilot arced out over the sea and ejected when the plane reached 3,500 feet. He was later picked up by Navy helicopter, and given a medical check in *Towers* (DLG-9) before being returned to *Oriskany*. Over the next few days, additional armed reconnaissance missions destroyed supplies and munitions in trains and trucks, and on 18 August, the “Spads” of VA-152 hit the jackpot. After following tire tracks into a wooded area, a *Skyraider* piloted by Lcdr. Eric H. Schade fired several zuni rockets into the trees “on a hunch.” The pilot was rewarded by a series of explosions, while “every rocket and strafing run added more secondaries.” Smoke from burning fuel and ammunition rose 6,700-feet in the air. The resulting burnt out swath of jungle was thenceforth known as “Eric’s Truck Park.” Also on the 18th, the air wing lost yet another *Crusader*, this time from VF-162. During a strike on a barge, Lcdr. Demetrio A. Verich’s F8E caught fire after being hit by debris from ground explosions. He maneuvered the sluggish plane out to sea, ejected and was safely picked up by an SH-3. These types of logistics strikes continued for the next two weeks, with both “Spads” and jets focusing their strikes on truck parks, trains and barges. Before the line period ended in early September, CVW-16 lost five more planes to operational causes and three more planes in combat, two to flak (though both pilots were recovered) and one to enemy aircraft. In the latter case, Air Force Capt. Wilford K. Abbott, flying a VF-111 *Crusader* off *Oriskany*, was ambushed and shot down by an enemy MiG jet fighter near Hanoi. He survived and was captured by the North Vietnamese. The only fatality during this latter period took place on 25 August, when Lt(jg) William H. Bullard’s VA-164 *Skyhawk* splashed at sea shortly after a night catapult launch.

Following five days at Subic Bay for rest and recreation, *Oriskany* sailed for Hong Kong for liberty on 15 September 1966. While underway, the aircraft carrier conducted cross-deck operations with British carrier *Victorious* and, on the 16th, helped rescue the crew from the British freighter *August Moon*, then aground on Pratas Reef in the South China Sea owing to a heavy storm. Despite high winds and heavy seas, the three UH-2B helicopters from the HC-1 detachment in *Oriskany* flew rescue operations, plucking 44 crewmen from the stricken cargo ship. During the operation one helicopter was engulfed by a huge 65-foot wave, knocking the bird into the sea. Quick reactions from the other helicopters saved all three crewmen and the entire operation came off without loss of life. After liberty in Hong Kong between 17-22

September, *Oriskany* returned for her third line period of this tour. The first multi-plane strike took place on the 27th, with an attack on island groups east of Haiphong that sank one enemy PT boat. Two days later, the air wing carried out a time-sensitive strike on an occupied SAM site, destroying an SA-2 launcher and receiving the Carrier Division Commander's "Prize for SAM Busting" for that line period. Following a major strike on Phu Ly on 1 October, the air wing returned to that complex on the 9th to attack a rail road bridge and marshalling area. During the attack, Cdr. Richard M. Bellinger of VF-162 intercepted an enemy MiG-21 *Fishbed* jet fighter and fired two heat-seeking Sidewinder missiles, one of which scored a lethal hit that sent the MiG-21 crashing in flames. The kill was particularly satisfying for Cdr. Bellinger, as he had been forced to eject during another MiG encounter three months previously. Over the next two weeks, the air wing launched strikes against ammunition dumps, rail lines and bypasses. During the first three and a half weeks of October, the air wing lost four planes to combat operations and two to operational loss, including four fatalities. VA-152 suffered three of the fatalities, with Lt(jg) James A. Beene lost at sea owing to mechanical failure during a thunderstorm and Lt. John A. Feldhaus and Ens. Darwin J. Thomas to enemy flak. A *Crusader* from VF-162 and a *Skyhawk* from VF-164 were also lost to ground fire, and while the former pilot was rescued, Lt. Frank C. Elkins was killed on 14 October when his aircraft crashed while trying to avoid a surface-to-air missile.

Combat operations came to a sudden halt on the morning of 26 October 1966 when a mishandled magnesium parachute flare ignited in the forward ready service locker. The three-foot long flare – burning at 5400 degrees Fahrenheit – set off the roughly 700 other flares inside the locker. The resulting explosion blew out the steel bulkheads of the flare locker, instantly killing five sailors, setting two nearby helicopters on fire and spreading flaming debris into the forward berthing areas. Smoke and flames quickly spread into passageways and ventilation systems, trapping dozens of officers in their staterooms. The automatic sprinkler system opened up, dumping curtains of water into the hangar but the magnesium continued burning, sending gouts of flame and a dense, acrid smoke deep into the forward section of the ship. In the hangar bay, teams play water over piles of steaming ordnance, desperately cooling bombs and aviation gasoline tanks as other sailors drag planes clear or jettison bombs over the side. Damage control teams spray water into the forward berthing areas too, protecting rescue teams who don OBA (self-contained oxygen breathing apparatus) and venture into the super-heated passageways, dragging out burned, asphyxiating sailors from their staterooms. Down below, tons of water collected in void spaces and compartments, trapping other sailors in darkness when their compartment power failed. Over the next seven hours, fire fighters and rescue parties slowly pushed back the flames, rescued survivors still trapped in compartments and recovered the wounded and the dead. The final tally was 35 officers (many of them pilots) and 8 enlisted men dead, with 38 others injured. The air wing lost two UH-2A helicopters and a *Skyraider* destroyed, with another three A-4s damaged, while the ship itself suffered heavy fire damage. *Oriskany* retired to Subic Bay on 28 October, where injured crewmen were transferred to waiting aircraft for flights to the United States that evening. The aircraft remained at Subic Bay for repairs until departing for San Diego on 2 November, arriving there on the 16th.

Oriskany got underway five days later, entering San Francisco Bay Naval Shipyard for overhaul and extensive fire-damage repairs on 23 November 1966. Yard work was completed on 23 March 1967 and the warship shifted to Alameda for sea trials in April and refresher training with

CVW-16 in May. Owing to the frenetic pace of both yard repairs and crew training, the aircraft carrier completed all deployment preparations by early June and sailed for her ninth western Pacific tour on the 16th. After short stops at Pearl Harbor and then Cubi Point, Philippines, where Commander, Carrier Division Nine, broke his flag on board on 9 July, *Oriskany* sailed to “Yankee Station” in the South China Sea. There, the aircraft carrier joined the ongoing interdiction campaign against the North Vietnamese road and rail network. As the attacks were nationwide in scope, even persistent strikes were unable to overload any critical element of the transportation system and the North Vietnamese adjusted routes in response to most strikes in a short period of time. One counter-method was the widespread use of Mark 36 Destructor magnetic-influence mines, intended to close roads and river ways by seeding chokepoints with the aerially-dropped mines. During the summer of 1967, Navy aircraft dropped these mines all around Hanoi and Haiphong, hoping to destroy all bulk rail lines and isolate river and road traffic into and out of those cities. These attacks, flying into the teeth of the North Vietnamese air defense system, took a heavy toll on *Oriskany*’s planes, beginning with heavy damage to a VA-164 *Skyhawk* during the very first strike on 14 July. With the nose cone of the plane shot off, Lt(jg) Laurence J. Cunningham had great difficulty flying the aircraft but managed to steer the crippled bird out to sea and to within sight of *Oriskany* before ejecting. He was quickly picked up by one of the carriers *Seasprites*.

Losses stayed high through the rest of July. The day after Cunningham’s rescue, a VA-152 *Skyraider* crashed after being hit by small arms fire during an anti-shipping strike, killing Lt(jg) Robin B. Cassell. On the 16th, during a late afternoon strike on the Phu Ly railroad yard, Lcdr. Demetrio A. Verich’s *Crusader* exploded after being struck by a SAM. Amazingly, Verich managed to eject safely and descended with a good chute onto a densely foliated ridge. Although no SAR effort was launched that evening owing to darkness, the following morning *Oriskany* jets and “Spads” escorted a *Sea King* on a hazardous two-hour 100-mile round trip inland to successfully pick up Verich just after dawn on the 17th.

Later that morning, however, the SAR teams had to do it all over again. During a strike against a rail road bridge south of Hanoi, two *Skyhawk*’s received fatal damage over the target from intense enemy antiaircraft fire. Both pilots bailed out alive and almost two dozen aircraft closed to support the SAR effort. Lt(jg) Larry J. Duthie landed through trees along a ridge, quickly moving one hundred yards up the hill to avoid capture. Enemy forces closed his position but were kept pinned by strafing from supporting *Skyriders*. Despite losing most of his equipment during his descent, Duthie still retained his radios and contacted the approaching Navy *Sea King*. Enemy small arms fire mortally wounded one helicopter crewman, however, driving away the bird which returned back to *Worden* (DLG-18). A short time later an Air Force “Jolly Green” helicopter managed to approach and pluck Duthie out from beneath the forest canopy. Meanwhile, less than five miles away, a good chute and “beeper” contact from the second pilot, Lcdr. Richard D. Hartman, allowed a second rescue effort but persistent MiG alerts and damage to the rescue helicopter ended the search at dusk. During the night Hartman evaded discovery and managed to contact *Oriskany* aircraft at 0525 the following morning. A waiting rescue mission went feet dry five minutes later and within an hour *Skyriders* and *Skyhawks* began pounding enemy antiaircraft positions with napalm and rockets. As the *Sea King* – from HS-2 embarked on *Constellation* (CVA-64) -- closed Hartman’s position, however, an enemy flak site opened up on the helicopter, which burst into flames and crashed, killing all four crewmen. No further SAR efforts launched and, although Hartman remained free for another day, he was

finally captured hiding in a cave. To compound the tragedy, Hartman later died in enemy captivity.

Before the end of the month, the air wing lost three more aircraft to combat damage. On 19 July, Cdr. Herbert P. Hunter, Jr., Executive Office of VF-162, received ground fire that heavily damaged the port wing of his F8E *Crusader*. Unable to refuel or jettison ordnance he attempted an emergency landing on *Bon Homme Richard*. The aircraft hit hard, missed the arrestor cables and crashed over the side, killing Cdr. Hunter. On the 25th, a *Skyhawk* crashed while strafing a truck convoy, killing Lcdr. Donald V. Davis. Lastly, during a multi-plane strike on the Thanh Lang petroleum complex northwest of Haiphong on the 31st, a SAM mortally damaged another VF-162 *Crusader*. Lt(jg) Charles P. Zuhoski bailed out of his burning plane safely but was quickly captured once he hit the ground. Another three aircraft were also lost to operational accidents in July, including a KA-3B *Skywarrior* tanker that suffered a dual flame out over the South China Sea on the night of 27 July. All three crewmen bailed out but only one, Lcdr. Michael W. Kavanaugh, was spotted by a patrolling VP-1 aircraft. He was later rescued by a boat from the American merchant ship SS *Fairport* but Ens. Bruce M. Patterson and AE2 Charles D. Hardie were never seen again.

In the midst of these operations, *Oriskany* also responded to a call for medical assistance from *Forrestal* (CV-59) after that aircraft carrier suffered a catastrophic series of fires and explosions on 29 July. By happenstance, one of *Oriskany's* *Seasprites* – piloted by Lt. David E. Clement -- was flying temporary plane guard aft of *Forrestal* when the initial fire broke out. Closing to investigate, the UH-2A proceeded down the port side and, as she passed abeam the port fantail, “a horrendous explosion shook the helicopter and appeared to engulf the whole stern of CVA-59.” Skimming into the wake of the stricken carrier, the crew quickly spotted sailors in the water. Dropping a swimmer, AN Albert E. Barrows, the helicopter hovered as he tried to get the shocked and burned survivors in the rescue sling. The hover was difficult owing to the close proximity of the ship, the continuing explosions that shook the helicopter and scattered flaming debris everywhere. Despite the difficulty of handling the survivors “because their burned skin kept coming off,” the crew managed to rescue five sailors from the water. The helicopters, pushing their flying limits owing to overheating due to heavy loads, then transferred medical personnel and firefighting equipment to the stricken carrier, dodging explosions, flying shrapnel and landing on a badly listing, debris covered deck. The birds then evacuated many of the *Forrestal's* injured sailors who were triaged in *Oriskany* before eventual transfer to hospital ship *Repose* (AH-16). Returning to the line for another week of operations, CVW-19 suffered another pilot killed, when a SAM knocked down Lt(jg) Ralph C. Bisz's *Skyhawk* near Haiphong on 4 August. In 1988, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam repatriated remains to the United States from Hai Hung Province and, in 2007, advanced mitochondrial DNA analysis by the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory obtained verifiable mtDNA that allowed the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) to identify the remains of Lt(jg) Bisz.

Following liberty at Cubi Point, *Oriskany* returned to Yankee Station for her second line period on 18 August. The ensuing two weeks of strikes again focused on interdiction strikes, including attacks on the Hanoi thermal power plant and rail road bridges south of Haiphong. As aerial photographs revealed an immense buildup of supplies in the port of Haiphong, but the existing rules of engagement prevented the bombing of the Soviet and communist Chinese munitions

stacked in open storage, the carriers struck at the transport routes out of the city instead. Beginning on 31 August, CVW-16 began a “donut” interdiction strategy around Haiphong, striking rail and road bridges and seeding the waterways with mines in order to slow the movement of supplies out of the city. The first heavy attack was costly, with three *Skyhawks* lost to a coordinated four SA-2 missile launch during the same 31 August strike on Haiphong. While pilots Lt(jg) David J. Carey and LCdr. Hugh A. Stafford both ejected from their burning jets and were captured, Lcdr. Richard C. Perry managed to coax his damaged Skyhawk before ejecting over the Gulf of Tonkin. Tragically, Perry either died of wounds suffered from the missile explosion or died during the ejection, as the rescue helicopter saw him hanging limp and without a life vest when he hit the water. A diver went in the water to assist in any case, found Perry dead and, unable to cut him free from the tangled parachute, was forced to abandon him owing to intense enemy mortar fire. Three other aircraft were lost to accidents over the next two weeks, but all three pilots were rescued. Toward the end of the month, poor weather began hampering strike operations and the planes switched to small night raids and armed reconnaissance missions – both of which were greatly assisted by the radar capabilities of attached E-1B Grumman *Tracers*. On 15 September *Oriskany* turned north and sailed for Japan, arriving in Yokosuka on the 19th. There, she underwent a Board of Inspection and Survey review in preparation for a planned overhaul the following year, before returning to line duty off Vietnam on 5 October.

As the *Skyhawks* continued bombing bridge targets around Haiphong, the North Vietnamese shifted cargo away from the interdicted land routes to barge traffic in the Red River delta. This river traffic then fell prey to the prowling “Spads” of VA-152 which, in October alone, destroyed 64 logistics craft and shot up another 75. The *Skyhawks* and *Crusaders* continued their strikes against North Vietnamese installations as well, targeting airfields at Kien An and Phuc Yen as well as power plants in Hanoi and Uong Bi. Losses were again heavy, with ten planes lost in combat during “Black October,” mostly *Skyraiders* that fell to antiaircraft guns during attack runs. Two pilots were killed in those attacks, with Lcdr. John F. Barr of VA-164 dying on 18 October after his *Skyhawk* exploded in midair and Lt(jg) Frederic W. Knapp of VA-164 killed on 2 November. A third pilot – Lt. Jeffrey M. Krommenhoek – was initially listed as MIA after a strike on Phuc Yen airfield on 25 October but was later declared killed-in-action. Of the four planes lost to SAMs, the first two killed both *Skyhawk* pilots, with Lt. David L. Hodges of VA-164 downed on 7 October and Lt(jg) James E. Dooley of VA-163 on 22 October, the latter’s plane splashing in the mouth of the river east of Haiphong. Another two aircraft fell to SA-2s south of Hanoi on 26 October. The pilots survived bailout but no SAR was initiated owing to the heavy populated area. Both Lcdr. John S. McCain and Lt(jg) Charles D. Rice remained in enemy captivity until March 1973. Unusually, only two pilots were rescued following these losses. The first was Lt(jg) Laurence J. Cunningham, who ejected for the second time this cruise on 11 October (having first been rescued on 14 July) but had the good fortune to again splash in the Tonkin Gulf. He was rescued by a helicopter from *Fox* (DLG-33) after 15 minutes in a life raft. A second pilot also ejected over water after his *Skyraider* was damaged on the 24th. Following a short rest period at Yokosuka between 6-15 November, *Oriskany* returned to “Yankee Station” five days later.

Oriskany’s fourth line period began on 20 November 1967 with monsoon weather in full force, with the entire region socked in with low, thick clouds. The weather curtailed many strikes, although a few low visibility mine-dropping missions were carried out using radar targeting

guidance from the E-1B *Tracers*. Of the two completed major strikes, one hit the Nui Long cave storage area and the other dropped a span of the Haiphong highway bridge. VA-152 also kept up their coastal reconnaissance raids, sinking 21 logistics craft and damaging another 34. Losses were accordingly light, with only one VF-111 *Crusader* shot down by anti-aircraft fire on 5 December and the pilot was rescued. That same day, one of the carriers' plane guard helicopters came to the aid of their brethren after *Ranger's* plane guard helicopter splashed. *Oriskany's* *Seasprite* sprinted to the wreck location and, as the survivors in the water popped smoke, easily picked up all four crewmen without incident. The highlight of the line period was another air-to-air combat engagement, when Lt. Richard E. Wyman of VF-162 pursued an enemy MiG-17 *Fresco* on 14 December 1967. After a 15-minute dog fight, Wyman managed to close and fire a *Sidewinder* missile into the North Vietnamese fighter, sending it cart wheeling in flames into a rice paddy. Two days later, *Oriskany* took another break owing to bad weather, steaming to Subic Bay, then Cubi Point and on to Hong Kong for the holidays. She returned to "Yankee Station" for her fifth and final line period of the tour on the last day of the year. Poor weather again limited most major strikes and even armed reconnaissance targets were fewer as the weather hampered North Vietnamese logistics efforts. Still, four planes were lost to enemy anti-aircraft fire, with Lt(jg) Richard W. Minnich and Lt(jg) Ralph E. Foulks, Jr. both killed in early January. Of the two pilots rescued, both managed to shepherd their damaged birds out over the sea, one of which glided all the way from Laos where the *Skyhawk* had been hit by 23mm fire.

The aircraft carrier turned for home on 15 January 1968, having completed 122 days of combat operations over North Vietnam. During the combat tour, CVW-16 suffered perhaps the highest loss rate of any naval air wing during the Vietnam conflict, losing half of assigned planes – 29 to combat damage and another 10 to operational causes – and had 20 pilots killed and another 9 taken prisoner. One contribution to this heavy loss rate was the air wings' unrelenting pace, as the pilots flew over 9,500 missions, including 181 air strikes into the heavily defended Hanoi-Haiphong corridor. Another contribution was the existence of safe havens for trucks and munitions within Haiphong in particular, as that meant targeting the flow of supplies in more heavily protected chokepoints further south. *Oriskany* returned to Alameda on 31 January and, after leave and upkeep, the crew began preparations for an upcoming nine-month overhaul. The warship entered San Francisco Naval Shipyard on 8 February to have new electrical generators, air conditioning and water distillers installed. The aircraft carrier also received repairs to her flight elevators, had her boilers refurbished in addition to the usual hundreds of post-deployment routine maintenance fixes. With yard work complete in the fall, the crew conducted refresher and pre-deployment training over the winter. In early 1969, *Oriskany* embarked a new air wing for familiarization and qualifications in preparation for her fourth deployment to Vietnam. In contrast to her previous air wing, CVW-19 did not include any *Skyraiders*, having two squadrons of F-8J *Crusaders* in VF-191 and VF-194, and three squadrons of A-4 *Skyhawks* in VA-23, VA-192 and VA-195, as well as the usual detachments of reconnaissance, tanker and early warning aircraft.

Oriskany sailed from Alameda on 16 April 1969, chopped in theater on 5 May and began her first line period at Yankee Station on 16 May.

There, the aircraft carrier began combat operations in a much more restricted environment than the previous deployment. Previously, in April 1968, President Johnson had restricted armed

attacks south of the nineteenth parallel, which limited strikes to the southern third of North Vietnam. Following a massive six-month interdiction effort that shut down all North Vietnamese rail traffic out of Haiphong, closed two inland waterways and eliminated virtual all coastal shipments, the air campaign was suspended on 1 November 1968. Domestic political considerations, mainly the upcoming presidential elections, played the critical role in this decision as President Johnson was leaving office. With Rolling Thunder strikes ended, the aircraft carriers at Yankee Station shifted operations to Viet Cong and infiltrating North Vietnamese Army targets in South Vietnam and against the logistics supply routes in enemy-occupied Laos, the so called Ho Chi Minh Trail. The new administration of President Richard M. Nixon fully supported bombing operations against the trail, as it would relieve pressure on the South Vietnamese Army as American ground forces began withdrawing from the war.

Called Operation Steel Tiger, strike operations over Laos began in late May 1969 against what were essentially time-sensitive targets. Aircraft arrived over communist logistics routes in eastern Laos and were directed by forward air controllers against primary and secondary targets of opportunity. While Laos was the target of most missions, about 30% of CVW-19s total effort was directed at I Corps' area in South Vietnam. In addition, the air wings' RF-8G reconnaissance aircraft still flew the dangerous but vital "Blue Tree" photographic missions over North Vietnam. *Oriskany's* first line period was short, lasting only until 3 June. Following a week or so at Subic Bay, the aircraft carrier returned to the line on 16 June. Enemy defenses in Laos were sparse in comparison to North Vietnam and aircraft mostly encountered small caliber antiaircraft fire. Indeed, the only pilot loss of the cruise took place on 20 July, when Lt. Stanley K. Smiley's *Skyhawk* crashed and exploded after being hit by small arms fire. The second line period ended on 30 June and, after ten days at Subic, the warship's third line period took place between 13-30 July. After a fourth line period between 16 August and 12 September, *Oriskany* steamed north to Korea to fly intermittent reconnaissance escort missions into early October. Following a fifth line period off Vietnam between 8-31 October, the aircraft carrier turned for home, arriving at Alameda via Subic Bay on 17 November.

Following a dry dock period at San Francisco Naval Shipyard over the winter, where the aircraft carrier was modified to support A-7 *Corsair II* aircraft, *Oriskany* embarked CVW-19 that spring for refresher operations. In contrast to previous deployments, she carried only four combat squadrons – VF-191 and VF-194 equipped with the familiar F8 *Crusaders* and VA-153 and VA-155 equipped with the new, snub-nosed *Corsair II* attack aircraft. Commencing her fifth Vietnam deployment on 14 May 1970, *Oriskany* inched on 1 June and began combat operations at Yankee Station on the 14th. Like her last deployment, *Oriskany* launched strikes against North Vietnamese logistics targets in eastern Laos, initially targeting storage areas, bunkers and lines of communication in conjunction with strikes by the Seventh Air Force. Equipped with better electronics gear, the *Corsair II* aircraft proved especially useful during night raids on the Ho Chi Minh trail. The missions remained dangerous, however, with a *Corsair II* from VA-155 lost in a failed catapult shot on 25 June and a VA-153 *Corsair II* crashing in Laos on 28 June. In the latter case, the aircraft – flown by Cdr. Donald D. Aldern, then Commander, Air Wing Nineteen -- exploded during a night attack run, presumably after taking flak damage. During this phase of the deployment, the aircraft carrier conducted three line periods -- 14-29 June, 13-21 July, 3-25 August and 18 September to 13 October – and launched over 5,300 sorties. During the latter line period, a VF-191 *Crusader* returning from a night combat air patrol on 6 October crashed the flight deck and exploded, killing Lt. John B.

Martin. In November, as part of the Navy's efforts to reduce costs, the number of aircraft carriers off Vietnam was reduced to one, meaning that *Oriskany*'s sole focus in her fourth line period 7-22 November was missions over Laos. In that effort, she joined the Seventh Air Force in strikes against four identified bottleneck points along the Ho Chi Minh trail. The carrier suffered another deadly accident on 14 November, when an RF-8G *Crusader* from VFP-63 skidded off the flight deck after a failed catapult launch, killing Lt. Joseph R. Klugg. Then, in an unusual assignment, *Oriskany* flew 14 diversionary sorties over North Vietnam early on 21 November in support of the Son Tay POW rescue mission and another 48 missions during retaliatory strikes later that day. The aircraft carrier turned for home the next day, arriving in Alameda on 10 December.

In a by now familiar pattern, *Oriskany* underwent a restricted availability at Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco during January 1971, receiving a much looked for upgrade in the SPN-41 all-weather carrier landing system. Refresher training passed uneventfully in March and on 14 May the aircraft carrier departed Alameda for her sixth Vietnam deployment. While steaming across the Pacific via Pearl Harbor, however, the normally uneventful crossing was livened up by the appearance of four Tupolev TU-95 *Bear* strategic bombers east of the Philippines. *Oriskany* fighters intercepted and escorted the aircraft as they flew through the region. Like the previous year, CVW-19 carried out strikes against communist logistics targets in Laos during five line periods off Vietnam, 16 June – 10 July, 25 July – 7 August, 5-26 September and 4-19 November. In between line periods, however, other duties began to intrude, subtly but surely indicating the Navy's focus was shifting away from Vietnam. In mid-August, for example, the aircraft carrier took part in a transit exercise against an American nuclear-powered submarine. This was followed by a strike exercise against the Okinawa Air Defense network on the 26th. Then, between her last two line periods, *Oriskany* carried out exercises in Philippine waters with HMS *Glamorgan* 26-27 October, indicating a renewed multi-national focus in response to the growing threat of the Soviet Navy in the 1970s. The main mission of the deployment, however, remained strike operations in Laos and while there were no combat losses during the cruise, CVW-19 did lose four aircraft to operational accidents. Two cases were fatal, with Cdr. Charles P. Metzler killed when his *Crusader* inverted and splashed while in a landing holding pattern on 21 June and Cdr. Thomas P. Frank drowned after ejecting from his stricken *Corsair II* following a catapult launch failure on 1 November. A week later, *Oriskany* aircraft took part in Operation Proud Deep, the successful 7-8 November strike (the largest in three years) against three North Vietnamese airfields whose fighters were beginning to worry Air Force planners. Following these last missions, *Oriskany* sailed south to Singapore for eight days of upkeep. Toward the end of the transit, the aircraft carrier crossed the equator and close to 2,000 Pollywogs became Shellbacks, thus "joining the realm of King Neptune Rex." Departing Singapore on 3 December, the warship steamed across the Pacific and arrived at Alameda via Subic Bay on the 18th for leave and upkeep.

As per her custom, *Oriskany* entered Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, San Francisco, on 17 January 1972 for her winter restricted availability. Refresher training followed in April and she embarked CVW-19 for qualifications in May. Events in Vietnam meanwhile, forced the warship into feverish preparations for deployment and she sailed for her seventh Vietnam tour on 5 June 1972. Following refueling stops at Pearl Harbor and Guam, the aircraft carrier arrived at Subic Bay on 21 June. Three days later, after loading her last combat supplies, *Oriskany* sailed through

heavy seas caused by typhoon Ora towards Yankee Station. On 28 June, however, the aircraft carrier collided with ammunition ship *Nitro* (AE-23) during an underway replenishment evolution. The collision put the number three aircraft elevator out of service but did not mission disable the carrier, so *Oriskany* took her place on the line that same day. There she joined six other aircraft carriers for Operation Linebacker, the largest bombing offensive against North Vietnam in five years and the largest gathering of aircraft carriers in a combat zone since World War II. Triggered in response to the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam from sanctuaries in Cambodia, navy and Air Force aircraft mined Haiphong harbor, dropped railroad and highway bridges with new precision-guided bombs and otherwise sought to isolate the southern battlefields from their supply sources in the north. In addition, the harbor mines and bridge strikes cut off the flow of foreign aid, and patrolling aircraft hunted small craft trying to shuttle supplies down the North Vietnamese coast. *Oriskany*'s first combat loss took place on 17 July, when Lt. Leon F. Haas was killed when his *Corsair II* crashed while conducting a night armed reconnaissance mission in the Tonkin Gulf. Four days later, the aircraft carrier herself suffered a major accident, when a screw and shaft section on number one main engine fell off. She spent 28 July to 11 August in dry dock at Yokosuka, Japan, for repairs, having number three elevator fixed as well.

Returning to Vietnam for the second and third line periods of the 1972 tour, 16 August - 1 September and 11-29 September, *Oriskany* and CVW-19 continued pounding targets in Quang Tri province south of the DMZ, playing their role in stopping the North Vietnamese Army offensive into South Vietnam. A spate of losses struck the air wing in late September, the first being a VA-155 *Corsair II* that suffered complete engine failure during a patrol over the Gulf of Tonkin. The pilot was able to eject safely and was quickly rescued by a helicopter from *Long Beach* (CGN-9). Four days later, another VA-155 *Corsair II*, piloted by Lt. Daniel V. Borah, was shot down by small arms fire near Quang Tri and the pilot was captured. Then, on the 26th, a third VA-155 *Corsair II* conducting an attack near the DMZ had the dubious distinction of running into a bomb dropped by an Air Force B-52 a mile overhead. Despite major damage to the vertical fin stabilizer, the pilot managed to coax the crippled plane to a safe landing at Da Nang airfield. Finally, on the morning of 27 September, a VF-194 *Crusader* crashed while trying to take off from the wet runway at Da Nang airfield, killing Lt. Richard B. Lineberry. Following a short upkeep period at Subic Bay, *Oriskany* returned to Vietnam for her fourth line period, 8-31 October. During the month, the pace of air strikes on storage areas and supply routes slowed as peace negotiations in Paris crept forward and then stopped as President Nixon formally ended Operation Linebacker on 23 October. The timing proved fortunate in one respect, as *Oriskany* lost a second screw – this time from number two shaft – on the 24th, and so diverted to Yokosuka in early November, arriving there on the 3rd.

Following the completion of repairs on 20 November 1972, the aircraft carrier returned to Yankee Station for her fifth line period, 25 November - 18 December. Although peace talks in Paris had stalled, *Oriskany*'s aircraft continued to pound communist targets in South Vietnam as allowed by weather. The warship withdrew to Subic Bay for upkeep on the same day President Nixon began Operation Linebacker II, a massive bomber-heavy series of raids on North Vietnam intended to kick start peace negotiations. The aircraft carrier joined the tail end of the so-called "Christmas bombing" campaign, for her sixth line period, 27 December – 30 January 1973. Attacks were then restricted to enemy targets south of the 20th parallel for the first two weeks of

January and then below the 17th parallel starting on the 16th. With the Paris Peace Accords signed on 27 January, *Oriskany*'s aviators finished up their last strikes over South Vietnam that same day. After a short rest period at Cubi Point in early February the aircraft carrier conducted one final combat line period, 11-22 February, when CVW-19 bombed enemy targets in Laos in a last effort to assist indigenous allies there against communist infiltration. Following upkeep at Cubi Point 8-14 March, *Oriskany* sailed for home, arriving at Alameda on the 30th after completing 169 days on the line, her longest and what proved to be her last combat tour.

After her usual fast-paced refit and training cycle, *Oriskany* got underway for the Far East on 18 October. After arrival at Subic Bay on 5 November, the aircraft carrier began preparations for operations in the Indian Ocean, a change of pace from her last seven tours off Vietnam. The aircraft carrier sailed south, transited the Straits of Malacca and rendezvoused with *Hancock* (CV-19) in the Indian Ocean. The two carriers conducted training operations there, and *Oriskany* visited Mombasa, Kenya, 22-27 December, before returning to the South China Sea in January 1974. The carrier then conducted various type training exercises out of Subic Bay in February and March, primarily concentrating on day and night flight operations in conjunction with other 7th fleet units. Following a series of three Fleet exercises in April, the warship visited Manila in May before sailing for home, arriving at Alameda on 5 June.

Two months later, the warship entered Long Beach Naval Shipyard on 15 August for an extended availability that lasted until 9 April 1975. Following refresher operations with CVW-19, *Oriskany* sailed on her fifteenth and final western Pacific deployment on 16 September. The carrier conducted war at sea and other exercises out of Subic Bay before returning home on 3 March 1976. Owing to defense budget cuts, as well as wear and tear on the old carrier, *Oriskany* was tapped for inactivation on 15 April and soon decommissioned on 30 September 1976.

Towed to Bremerton, Wash., the old carrier remained in reserve until struck from the Navy list on 25 July 1989 for use as a museum ship or scrapping. Initially intended for possible sale to Japan as a museum ship, the hulk was eventually ordered scrapped, the hulk was towed to the Gulf Coast, but three subsequent dismantling contracts were cancelled owing to cost and environmental concerns. Ultimately, after many years of planning and hazardous material clean up, the aircraft carrier was sunk as an artificial reef off Pensacola, Florida, 17 May 2006.

Oriskany received two battle stars for Korean service and ten for Vietnamese service.

