

Great Ships of The U. S. Navy

U.S.S. Coral Sea

by Mike Prero

USS CORAL SEA was launched 2 April 1946. It made the first carrier launchings of planes of this size and weight. On 21 April 1950, the first carrier take-off of an AJ-1 Savage heavy attack bomber was made from USS CORAL SEA. It then returned to the Mediterranean from September to 1 February 1951. In 1951, as flagship for Commander, Carrier Division 6, she took part in a North Atlantic Treaty Organization Exercise Beehive I. She sailed for the Mediterranean 19 April 1952. While on service with the 6th Fleet, she visited Yugoslavia, and carried Marshall Tito on a one-day cruise to observe carrier operations. The ship was reclassified CVA-43 in 1952. In 1954, the ship was visited by Generalissimo Franco as she lay off Valencia, Spain. During the Suez Crisis, she evacuated American citizens from the troubled area, and stood by off Egypt until November.

USS CORAL SEA was decommissioned for conversion 24 May 1957, and upon completion was recommissioned 25 January 1960 to rejoin the Fleet. Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August, USS CORAL SEA departed on 7 December 1964 for duty with the U.S. Seventh Fleet. On 7 February 1965, aircraft from USS CORAL SEA blasted the military barracks and staging areas near Dong Hoi in the southern sector of North Vietnam. On 26 March, the Seventh Fleet units began participation in Operation Rolling Thunder, a systematic bombing throughout North Vietnam. Pilots from USS CORAL SEA struck island and coastal radar stations in the vicinity of Vihn Son. CORAL SEA continued WestPac/Vietnam deployments until 1975. CORAL SEA was on Yankee Station when the North Vietnamese spring offensive began. On 16 April 1972, aircraft from USS CORAL SEA and others flew 57 sorties in the Haiphong area.

Operation Pocket Money, the mining campaign against principal North Vietnamese ports, was launched 9 May 1972. CORAL SEA launched aircraft loaded with mines and one EKA-3B in support of the mining operation directed against the outer approaches to Haiphong Harbor. By spring 1975, the North was advancing on the South. USS CORAL SEA and others responded 19 April 1975 to the waters off South Vietnam when North Vietnam overran two-thirds of South Vietnam. CORAL SEA was presented the Meritorious Unit Commendation on 6 July 1976.

Hornets from USS CORAL SEA and A-7E Corsairs from USS AMERICA (CV 66) conducted air-to-surface Shrike and HARM missile strikes against Libyan surface-to-air missile sites in 1986. In 1989, CORAL SEA responded to a call for assistance from USS IOWA due to an explosion in the battleship's number two gun turret in which 47 crew members were killed.

USS CORAL SEA was decommissioned 26 April 1990. Stricken from the Navy List, she was sold by the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service (DRMS) for scrapping on 7 May 1993. [<http://navysite.de/cvn/cv43.htm>]

