

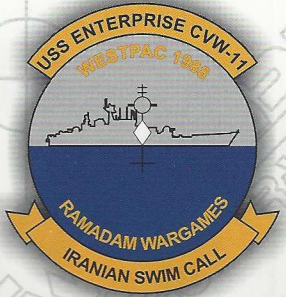
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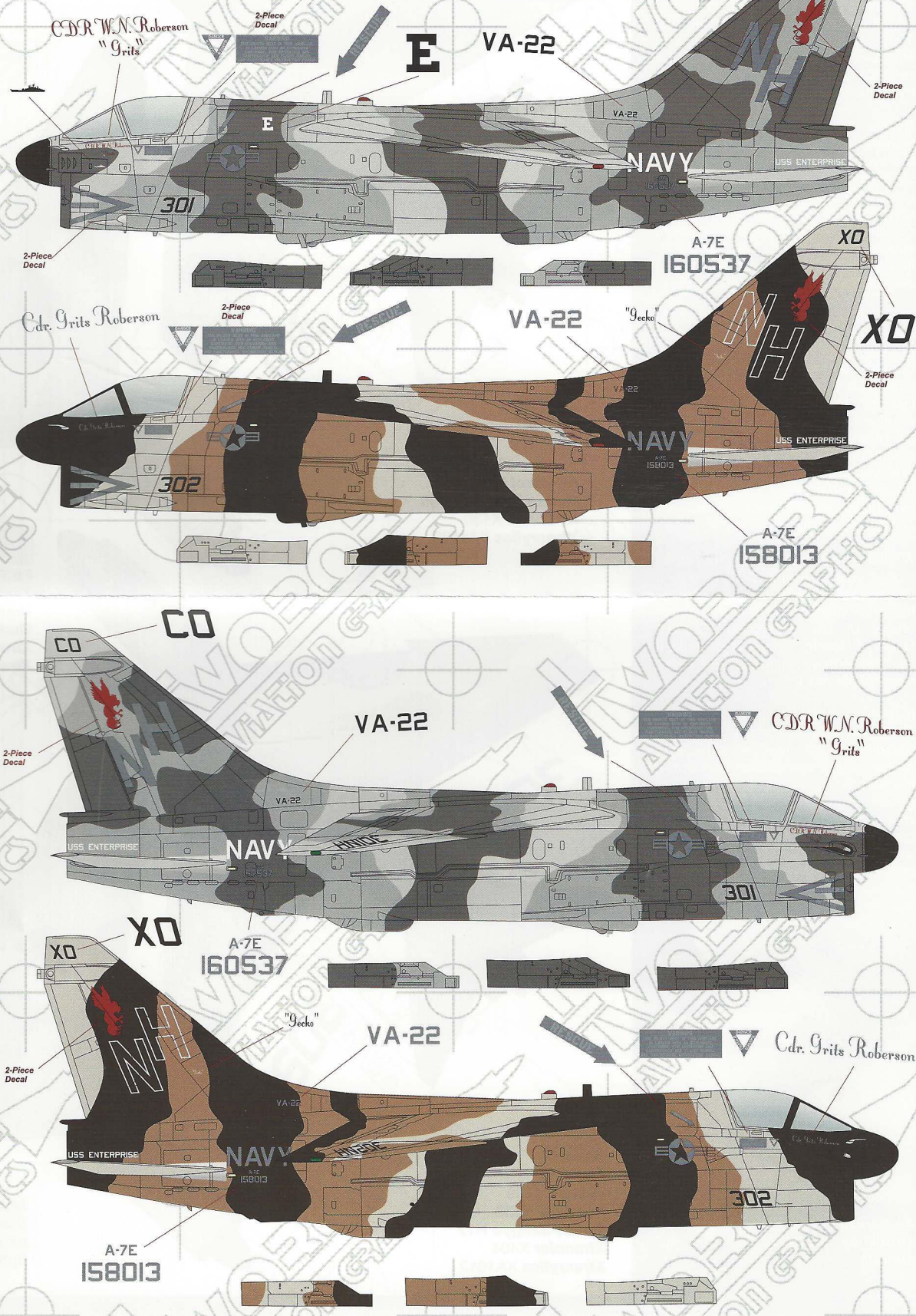


Operation Praying Mantis

At the end of Desert Storm, VA-72 painted one of its A-7Es in desert camouflage, this aircraft becoming without a doubt the most famous camouflaged Corsair II to wear a "star and bar". However, this particular aircraft was by no means the only A-7E combat veteran to be adorned in a special celebratory one-off scheme. A brief but bloody skirmish in the Straits of Hormuz in April 1988 saw VA-22 Fighting Redcocks and VA-94 Mighty Shrikes pitted against the Iranian Navy during Operation Praying Mantis. The result was several enemy vessels sunk, a frigate badly holed and the "boss bird" of VA-22 resprayed in a distinctive, but little publicized colour scheme.

When the mixed strike packages launched from USS Enterprise (CVN-65) on the morning of 18 April 1988, elements of the Seventh Fleet were going to war for the first time since the Mayaguez incident some 13 years earlier. Operations conducted by Carrier Air Wing Eleven (CVW-11) during the grandly titled War-At-Sea were in response to an incident that had taken place four days earlier.

The Oliver Perry class frigate, USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG-58) was on patrol in international waters when it struck an Iranian mine. Other devices were found in the Persian Gulf, and the Seventh Fleet was given authorization from the White House to carry out limited retaliatory strikes against Iranian oil platforms identified as supporting mine-laying operations, and a pair of "Saam"-class frigates notorious for strafing supertankers in the Gulf. -over-



The War-at-Sea commenced with the shelling of the Sassan and Siri-D platforms by a number of surface ships, before their final demise at the hands of US Marine Corps demolition teams. This action quickly resulted in a number of Iranian "Boghammer" class gunboats putting to sea from Abbar Mussa island. These lightly armed, but highly manoeuvrable vessels were quickly dealt with a mixed force of VA-95 Green Lizards A-6E Intruders and VA-22 Redcocks A-7E Corsair IIs. Two gunboats were sunk with Rockeye cluster bomb units, and the remaining vessels hastily run ashore by their crews.

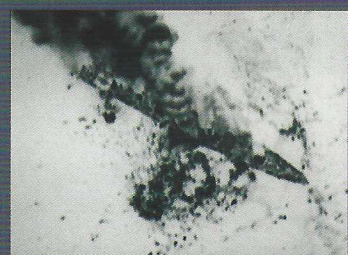
By this stage the Saam class frigates Sahand and Sablan had also entered the fray, the former being dispatched by a veritable onslaught of weapons unleashed by the heavy and light strike units of CVW-11. Both A-7 squadrons contributed to the vessel's destruction, scoring direct hits with their Mk82 500-lb and Mk83 1,000-lb iron bombs, as well as Walleye guided weapons.

The Sablan, meanwhile, had been hit by a single GBU-10 2,000-lb laser guided bomb launched from an Intruder, and was motionless in the water. A flight of A-7s had already launched from the Enterprise and was in-bound to finish off the vessel when Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci rescinded the War-at-Sea directive, and the Corsair IIs were ordered to return to the carrier. The frigate was eventually towed back to Bandar Abbas by three Iranian Navy tugs.

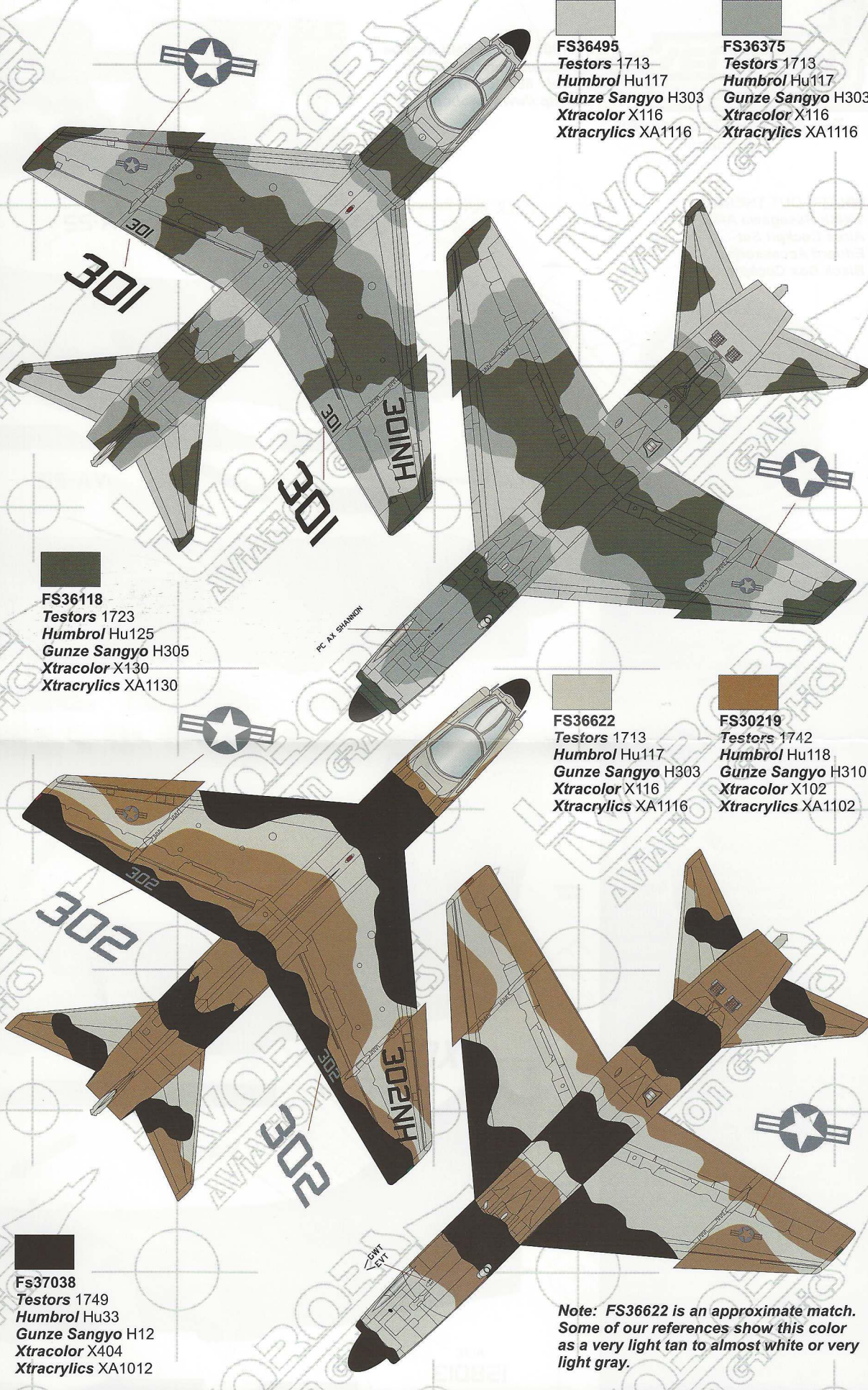
A total of 80 fighter and 160 strike sorties was flown by CVW-11 during the brief Operation Praying Mantis, this effort prompting the commanding officer of the Enterprise, Captain Robert J. "Rocky" Spang, to describe it as "the largest American sea battle since World War II."

By the end of the operation elements of the American fleet had damaged Iranian naval and intelligence facilities on two inoperable oil platforms in the Persian Gulf, and sank at least six armed Iranian speedboats. Sablan was repaired in 1989 and has since been upgraded, and is still in service with the Iranian navy. In short, Iran lost one major warship and a smaller gunboat. Damage to the oil platforms was eventually repaired and they are now back in service.

Tony Holmes



An Iranian vessel burns after being struck by US Navy A-6 and A-7 aircraft.



FS36495
Testors 1713
Humbrol Hu117
Gunze Sangyo H303
Xtracolor X116
Xtracrylics XA1116

FS36375
Testors 1713
Humbrol Hu117
Gunze Sangyo H303
Xtracolor X116
Xtracrylics XA1116

FS36118
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FS36622
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Humbrol Hu117
Gunze Sangyo H303
Xtracolor X116
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FS30219
Testors 1742
Humbrol Hu118
Gunze Sangyo H310
Xtracolor X102
Xtracrylics XA1102

Fs37038
Testors 1749
Humbrol Hu33
Gunze Sangyo H12
Xtracolor X404
Xtracrylics XA1012

Note: FS36622 is an approximate match. Some of our references show this color as a very light tan to almost white or very light gray.