

ONBOARD, ON WATCH. MISSION READY.



Deployed on the world's most advanced aircraft carriers, the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG) deliver proven efficiency and performance to support decades of naval aviation operational readiness.







Cover: The VFA-27 Royal Maces CAG bird stands out against the mountains of Guam during a recent detachment.

Photo: USN



Page 19





Page 34



Page 40

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Hill Goodspeed

SENIOR EDITOR Mark Aldrich

DESIGN AND LAYOUT ChampCohen Design Associates

PROOFREADER Phyllis Carter

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

CDR Doug Siegfried, USN(Ret) CDR Jan C. Jacobs, USNR(Ret) CDR Robert R. "Boom" Powell, USN(Ret) LCDR Richard R. Burgess, USN(Ret) Barrett Tillman CDR Jack D. Woodul, USNR(Ret)

> NEY ENE SCH

Printing by Neyenesch Printers San Diego, Calif



- 4 From the President CDR Kristen "Dragon" Findlay, USN
- 5 From the Editor-in-Chief Hill Goodspeed
- 9 From the Director, Air Warfare RADM Michael Donnelly, USN
- 10 From the Executive Director CAPT Greg "Chaser" Keithley, USN(Ret)
- AN AIRPLANE STORY 13
- **MEMBERSHIP CORNER** 14
- 16 TAILHOOK EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION
- 19 FROM THE CATWALK

conducted by "Boom" Powell

- LAUNCH 25
 - 25 The *Canasta* Connection

by Doug Bohs

- 31 "Who's Sleeping with Bug Roach's Jacket?" Reflections on Hook '23
 - by Bonnie Towne
- 34 Voyage of the *Viking* by LCDR Rick Burgess, USN(Ret)
- 40 Seahawks Soar in Era of AR by LT Carly S. Courtney, USN
- **IN MARSHAL Command Changes**
 - 46 Carrier, Carrier Air Wing and Squadron Reports
- **WAVEOFFS & BOLTERS** 81
 - 81 What is It?
- **82** RESPOT
- 84 ON DECK
 - 84 An Aircrewman's View of the Battle of the Philippine Sea by Hill Goodspeed
- **IBC** PATCH PAGE

IBC S-3 Viking Squadrons Through the Years

Articles and news items are welcome. Submit material for The Hook to: Editorial Offices, The Hook, 9696 Businesspark Ave., San Diego, CA 92131-1643. (858) 689-9227 or (800) 322-HOOK, email: thookmagazine@gmail.com • website: http://www.tailhook.net Advertising: Potomac Media LLC, 2125 Observatory Pl. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20007. (202) 363-3741, fax: (888) 325-9943, email: potompub@aol.com

TAILHOOK ASSOCIATION CORPORATE MEMBERS

The following corporations exhibit strong support of Naval Aviation through their membership in the Tailhook Association:

Amentum ATAC BAE Systems Bell Flight The Boeing Company Chemring Energetic Devices Collins Aerospace Draken International Eaton Corporation General Atomics General Electric Aerospace HII-Newport News Shipbuilding Jacksonville Jet Port L3Harris Lockheed Martin Aeronautics MBDA Missile Systems McClellan Jet Services Million Air Navy Mutual Aid Association Northrop Grumman Corporation Omega Aerial Refueling Service, Inc. Pratt & Whitney Radiance Technologies Raytheon Technologies Rolls-Royce North America The Skyhawk Association Solairus Aviation Tactical Air Support, Inc. Talon Asset Management LLC Trident Home Loans Tripp Scott, P.A.

In appreciation of our advertisers

USAA V2X

The Hook relies on advertising to maintain its quality and financial well-being.

We appreciate the loyalty of our advertisers and encourage our readers to support the following advertisers:

AV8RSTUFF.com
A-4 Skyhawk Association
A-6 Intruder Association
A-7 Corsair Association
LCDR "Engine Eddie" Davidson
The Distinguished Flying Cross Society
Thad Dupper
F-14 Tomcat Association
Friends of Naval Aviation, Inc.
General Atomic Electromagnetics
General Electric
Idloom Events
JT4
KIHOMAC

Idloom Events
JT4
KIHOMAC
Navy Mutual Aid Association
Newport News Shipbuilding
Neyenesch Printers
Omega Aerial Refueling Services, Inc.
Pratt & Whitney
Prowler Association
River Rats
Tactical Air Support, Inc.

Tactical Air Support, Inc.
Top Hook Realty
Trident Home Loans
VAW/VRC Foundation
V2X

THE TAILHOOK ASSOCIATION



9696 Businesspark Ave. San Diego, CA 92131-1643 (858) 689-9223 • (800) 322-HOOK

PRESIDENT

CDR Kristen "Dragon" Findlay, USN

PRESIDENT EMERITUS

CAPT Lonny K. "Eagle" McClung, USN(Ret)

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

RADM Mike "Nasty" Manazir, USN(Ret)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CAPT Gregory J. "Chaser" Keithley, USN(Ret)

OFFICERS

Vice President for Naval Aviation Reserve Matters CAPT Beth A. Creighton, USN(RC)

> Vice President for Marine Corps Affairs LtCol Thomas "Loaf" Bolen, USMC

Vice President for Civilian Affairs

Ms. Angie Knappenberger

Vice President for Outreach
CAPT Sterling "Sterls" Gilliam, USN(Ret)

Vice President for Strategic Communication

CAPT Rodger L. Welch, USN(Ret)

Vice Presidents for Strategy

CAPT Michael T. "Jockey" Lisa, USN(Ret) CAPT D.A. "Roy" Rogers, USN(Ret)

Vice Presidents for Membership

CAPT Tracy Barkheimer, USN(Ret) CAPT James S. "Goat Boy" Bates, USN CDR Tim F. "T-Murf" Murphy, USN(Ret) LtCol Frank "Squiggy" Savarese, USMC(Ret)

Vice Presidents for Business Development

CAPT James P. DiMatteo, USN(Ret) CAPT Scott "Topper" Farr, USN(Ret) CDR James D. "Max" Gross, USN(Ret) CAPT Walter "Spanky" Stammer III, USN(Ret)

Vice President of Legislative Affairs CAPT Kevin "Proton" McLaughlin, USN(Ret)

Vice President for Social Media

CAPT Mehdi Akacem, USN

Financial Advisor

Richard S. Carlquist, AIF®, CFP®

Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer

CDR Tom "Tex" Lawson, USN(Ret)

Secretary

CDR Neil G. "Cowboy" Zerbe, USN(Ret)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

VADM Jerry "Steamer" Beaman, USN(Ret)
CAPT Adan "Cherry" Covarrubias, USN(Ret)
CAPT J.J. "Yank" Cummings, USN(Ret)
Col Jerrold "Geri" Devore, USMC
CAPT Jim "Gigs" Gigliotti, USN(Ret)
LT Mark "Tugboat" Jbeily, USN
CAPT Shawn "Shrek" Malone, USN(Ret)
RADM Mike "Nasty" Manazir, USN(Ret)
CDR Toni "Miggles" Miggins, USN
VADM Chip "Bullet" Miller, USN(Ret)
CDR Melodie "Mel" Palmer, USN(Ret)
CDR Corey "Humble" Pritchard, USN(Ret)
RDML James "J.J." Quinn, USN(Ret)
CAPT Bradley "Plug" Russell, USN(Ret)
CAPT Walt "Sarge" Slaughter, USN(Ret)

Page 2 The Hook, Summer 2024



Protect your loved ones wherever you go.

Navy Mutual has been providing life insurance to military families since 1879. Our products are built with you in mind, with premiums to fit your budget, coverage options for children, and no service restrictions or aviation clauses for our active duty members.

Get a quote and apply online. Prefer to speak with a person? Our friendly representatives are standing by to take your call.

Active Duty / Reserve / Retirees / Veterans / Military Spouses and Children



Give us a call at 800-628-6011 or visit us online at NavyMutual.org/Navy.

Photo courtesy of the United States Department of Defense. The DOD does not endorse any company or their products or services.



BRIEF

ailhook Nation,

I hope this finds you well as we transition to the summer months. Our annual symposium is quickly approaching, and I am excited for our community to come together once again to celebrate our friendships, partnerships and combined mission. Our tactics, test, personnel and capabilities subject matter experts are ready to fill our panels and impart their wisdom as to how we are staying and working toward being ready. Things are shaping up to be a fabulous and informative week!

From the President

In our Integrated Air Dominance panel, weapons school instructors will discuss how we combine the capabilities of not only our Navy assets, but those of our sister services to bring the full might of the United States to bear. That high-end fight is enabled by our weapons systems and software, which are constantly evolving and pushing the envelope.

Our Arming the Warfighter panel will focus on how we keep our tools relevant and ensure the fleet remains up to date and trained on the systems that give us the edge in combat.

In addition, we are looking forward to hearing the sea stories of those just returning from deployment. Our From the Front Lines panel will discuss the challenges faced by Naval Aviation warfighters and how training prepared them for the real-world situations faced during months at sea across the globe.

With that, I hope to see you all at the Grand Sierra Resort in August. The opportunity to have all our members under one roof is an exciting prospect with the potential to make this the best Hook to date! Please join us in celebrating everything Tailhook aviation has to offer.

See you in Reno!



CDR Kristen "Dragon" Findlay, USN

MC3 Nicholas Rodriguez, USN



This issue of the magazine commemorates the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the S-3 *Viking* to fleet service with an updated article by LCDR Rich Burgess, USN(Ret) that first appeared in *The Hook* in 2008. Looking back to that time in 1974, it is interesting to read how a military correspondent characterized the new aircraft, calling it "a sophisticated fusion of aircraft, computer and sensory systems" with a mission of "destroying the best submarines of the '70s and '80s." To be sure, the *Viking* represented new technology and the Soviet submarines that were their quarry were advanced platforms. However, the mission was not new, the Navy having been seeking out and attacking enemy submarines since World War I. In short, it was not unprecedented.

From the Editor-in-Chief

But that is the title chosen by CVW-3 for their In Marshal submission to describe their headline-making operations against Houthi rebels, defending the carrier strike group and merchant shipping against a range of unmanned platforms. It is a battle without a blueprint, an unveiling of the future of air warfare.

What do the two have in common? It is the need to be ready, whether keeping pace with the emerging capabilities of a long-standing adversary or adapting to combat a new threat. Appropriately, this is the theme of Hook '24.

Traditionally, as the last issue of the magazine to go to print before the annual symposium, we have no shortage of content, which is always a good thing for Senior Editor Mark Aldrich and me. In addition to CVW-3's contribution referenced above, the reports from the fleet are wide-ranging,

training flight in the Sierras on 10 Apr '24. The newest Marine Corps squadron equipped with the JSF, the Tomcats' ranks over the years have included astronaut John Glenn and baseball slugger Ted Williams.

packed with news of real-world activities interspersed with the humorous recounting of JOPA activities. The VFA-27 *Royal Maces* were among the first to submit this time around and they included a number of beautiful images from their recent detachment to Guam, one of which graces the cover.

In addition to the article on the *Hoover*, the Launch section line-up includes a submission from Doug Bohs about the rescue of Air Force F-105 *Thunderchief* pilot Capt Frank Tullo in North Vietnam, the *Fist of the Fleet* pilots who flew Rescue Combat Air Patrol over the recovery site and



Hill Goodspeed

their reunion years later. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the VAW-126 *Seahawks*, LT Carly Courtney details her squadron's experiences with aerial refueling and its impact on the VAW community. As attendees at recent Tailhook symposiums have noticed, the National Naval Aviation Museum has displayed the flight jacket that belonged to CDR John "Bug" Roach, the namesake of the mixer that draws Naval Aviators from far and wide. The keeper of the jacket last year, Bonnie Towne, captures what it symbolizes about the man and the long shadows cast by the legendary figures that inspire the generations that have followed them.

This issue's An Airplane Story feature will prompt those who flew the "Big Fighter" to check their logbooks. And in remembrance of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Philippine Sea, we hope you enjoy our On Deck article that draws from the diary of an SB2C *Helldiver* aircrewman recounting his flight against the enemy.

An F-35C Lightning II assigned to VMFA-311 pictured during a low-level

Page 4 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 5

MC2 Kenneth Lagadi, USN



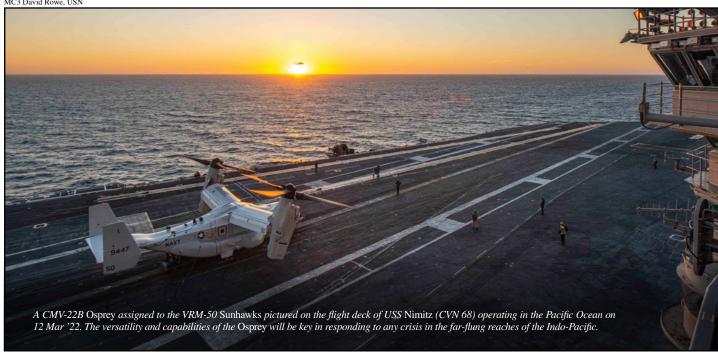
he V-22 *Osprey* has been and will continue to be one of the most sought-after aircraft by theater commanders, second only to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets. As the nation's first operational military tilt-rotor, the V-22 provides commanders with mission flexibility to win in today's operating environment and in any future fight.

The *Osprey's* ability to take off and land vertically like a helicopter and fly horizontally like an airplane is transformational, providing our armed forces with unique capabilities that change how missions are accomplished. The aircraft's nacelles, capable of rotating 90 degrees to MC3 David Rowe, USN

deliver unmatched flight versatility, are located on the ends of the wings and house the power and propulsion for the two rotors.

As the V-22 fleet approached 450,000 flight hours, it became apparent that the wing component was subject to significant forces, including vibration and heat. The Bell Boeing team, along with industry partners and fleet maintainers, implemented a data-driven design change to improve the reliability and maintainability of the critical nacelles, making the V-22 an even more powerful platform.

The Nacelle Improvement (NI) program aimed to simplify the nacelle structure, originally designed decades ago with a series of wires and



junction boxes. The effort led to successful re-engineering of more than 1,300 parts and using point-to-point wiring, making manufacturing more affordable and less time-consuming.

"Nearly sixty percent of all maintenance actions occur within the V-22's nacelle area, so the NI effort is designed to attack the highest reliability and readiness degraders while maximizing return on investment for the taxpayer," says Kurt Fuller, Bell senior vice president and V-22 program manager. The NI program was initiated with CV-22s, the U.S. Air Force's variant of the *Osprey*, and the modification has demonstrated consistently positive results.

Before NI modification, the average maintenance time dedicated to nacelles was more than 2.5 hours per fight hour. Twenty CV-22s have undergone the NI modification and with over 4,000 hours flown, those aircraft have required only 12 maintenance hours and not required any maintenance actions on the modified nacelles.

This has saved the Air Force over 10,000 total nacelle maintenance hours. Maintainability and reliability were key performance parameters in the new design to measure success, and the results have exceeded expectations. Delivering both short and long-term benefits to support the longevity of the fleet, the NI program provides immediate readiness advances that will continue to pay long-term dividends in availability and affordability.

The results seen by the Air Force will translate to the Navy CMV-22 and the Marine Corps MV-22. In the Indo-Pacific theater specifically, the increasing need for sea services to prepare for and execute expeditionary

advanced base operations and distributed maritime operations is exposing a vulnerable logistical capability gap. If deterrence fails and conflict occurs, naval commanders will have to resupply their forces over vast distances. This poses significant operational challenges where force structure does not match its combat logistics requirements.

In times of rapid response and crisis, commanders cannot spend as much time planning how to support the force as they do to employ it. The solution is to focus on fortifying the *Osprey* fleet now. Taking actions today to modernize and sustain the V-22 variants across the services will ensure that operational capabilities align with strategic imperatives.

The requirement to move forces and cargo between dispersed bases, forward logistic support sites and ships at sea will prioritize the need for a dedicated logistics connector. That connector must possess and demonstrate the speed, range and versatility that only tilt-rotor technology can provide. The V-22 is that valuable connector.

The strategic imperatives facing the Navy and Marine Corps, combined with the demonstrated, significant returns on investment in aircraft availability and affordability, make support for the NI program an imperative.

The opinions expressed in this editorial do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the Tailhook Association or its members.

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

Airman1/c Bailey Wyman, USAF



Page 6 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 7

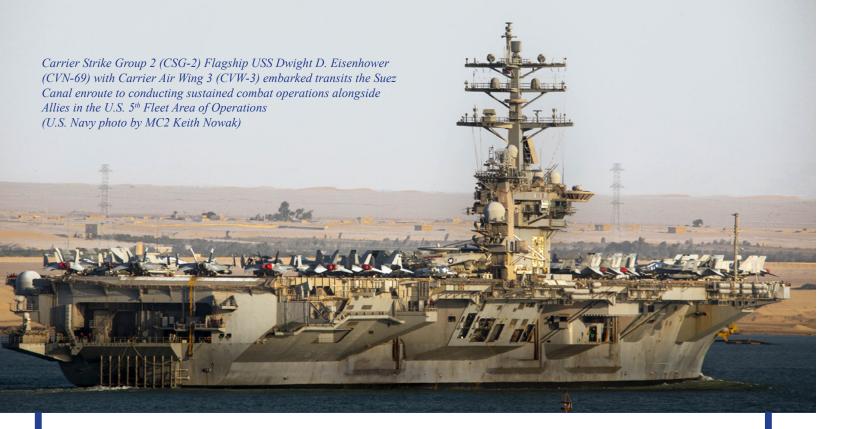


Association of Naval Aviation

Proud Sponsor

Tailhook Reunion 2024

"Be Ready"



Supporting all of Naval Aviation's communities since 1975

Publishing **WINGS OF GOLD** magazine "The Voice of Naval Aviation Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow"

Join up at ANAhq.org



reetings, Tailhook Nation! Your requirements officers and resource sponsors at OPNAV N98 remain resolute in our commitment to provide naval air combat power capable of securing decisive victories against adversaries. While advanced platforms, mission systems and next-generation weapons are essen-

tial, they comprise just one aspect of ensuring we are equipped to confront the challenges and intricacies of tomorrow's battlefield. We are focused on achieving warfighter readiness through advanced integrated training that centers on cultivating skilled aviators prepared for the high-end fight. It is through this commitment to comprehensive training that Naval Aviation distinguishes itself and gains an edge over the competition.

From the Director, **Air Warfare Evolving Naval Aviation Training** for Peak Warfighter Effectiveness

by RADM Michael Donnelly, USN Director, Air Warfare (OPNAV N98)

The landscape of Naval Aviation training is evolving rapidly and driven by a myriad of factors. These include airspace constraints, spectrum limitations, operational security concerns and the ever-evolving threat environment. Live-fly training will remain a cornerstone of our proficiency development while simulated and virtual training continue to improve at an exponential rate, providing ready-relevant competency evaluation and high-rate skills repetition at often lower risk and faster training development. In response, we must adapt and embrace innovative and complementary solutions to ensure our readiness and effectiveness in the air and across multiple domains remain unmatched.

Central to this adaptation is the expansion of our training capabilities within the synthetic environment. Here we find avenues to replicate realistic scenarios, integrate multidomain operations and hone our skills in a controlled setting. Synthetic Inject to Live (SITL) technologies such as Link Inject to Live (LITL) and Distributed Mission Training (DMT)

simulators offer us the flexibility to conduct high-end training exercises while overcoming the restraints of traditional live-fly operations.

Key to this transition is the Naval Continuous Training Environment (NCTE), which serves as the nexus for connecting Naval Aviations training platforms and simulations. Additionally, the Joint Simulation Environment (JSE) provides a highfidelity, physics-based environment for immersive training experiences. To effectively operate as a cohesive team in combat, it is imperative that we have the opportunity to train in a unified and synthesized manner. Our focus remains to equip



RADM Michael Donnelly, USN

elements of the carrier strike group with the necessary capabilities and training resources, allowing them to train collectively to operate effectively.

The synthetic environment offers us the flexibility to adapt our tactics and strategies to address evolving threats. The critical factor is to ensure that all components of the team can train together within a realistic threat environment. This guarantees that every member of the team is prepared to operate seamlessly in combat and when facing challenges in real-

However, as we embrace these advancements, we must not lose sight of the fundamentals that training inside a physical aircraft provides. Decisionmaking under g-loading remains a critical skill that must be honed and maintained. Acknowledging that truth, our training plan must prioritize warfighter proficiency, focusing on a performance-based approach that leverages technology-aided, adaptive learning. This approach ensures scalability across all levels of training — from individual skill development to integrated exercises — and extends to proficiency sustainment during at-sea operations. By embracing innovation and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, we will navigate the challenges ahead and emerge as a stronger, more capable force in Naval Aviation.

Our greatest driver that will deliver our successful training outcomes, of course, are the women and men who find themselves in the cockpits and supporting operations at sea. We will continue to support our warfighters in all that we do here. Thank you!





The Hook, Summer 2024

Hook '24

s we celebrate our 68th year as an association, our carriers, platforms, tactics and tools continue to be variables of change and modernization while a single constant remains the same — the essence of the warfighter. This year's "Be Ready" theme, a focus on today's warfighter, will provide the perfect landscape to showcase such a constant as we gather with those who were in attendance over six decades ago, those attending for their very first time and everyone in between; at Hook we'll be linked by the carrier aviation warfighter constant.

From the Executive Director

Our president, CDR Kristen "Dragon" Findlay, has put together a robust agenda, including theme-based marquee panel sessions led by world-class moderators and panelists. Additionally, you will not want to miss other key briefs, the Air Boss' Flag Panel, spouse social, "Jig Dog" Ramage Awards Luncheon, winging ceremony and banquet. Speaking of warfighters, we are proud to announce that our Saturday night banquet guest speaker will be ADM Sam "Pappy" Paparo, Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

Thanks to you, Hook '24 stands to be a record year. Having outgrown The Nugget, the Grand Sierra Resort (GSR) in Reno provides more exhibit space and guest room capacity. As I write this, we are on track to occupy every available room at the GSR, and our largest exhibit floor is completely sold out. Included in the new layout is an 8,000-square-foot venue that we will transform into the Tailhook Lounge and Bar. If it's been a while since you've been to Hook, make the decision to join us this year as we take our annual symposium to the next level with a larger venue and something to offer for everyone.

Registrations are strong, so please continue to register online. As a personal favor, I'm asking you not to wait to do so on-site. Preparation for Hook is immensely detailed, and registering when you get there poses problems in adjusting catering requirements. Life members, be sure to take advantage of the 50 percent registration discount. Go to our website now (www.tailhook.net) and make your room reservations, register for Hook and help this year's Hook '24 scholarship drive by making a donation. Come to Hook and help set a new attendance record.

Special Life Membership Discount at Hook '24

Life membership provides long-term stability to any organization and Tailhook is no exception as roughly 60 percent of all members are now Life members, an all-time high. For those attending Hook '24 or on MC2 Matthew Nass LISN

deployment, we are once again offering a \$200 discount for a Life membership at the rate of \$595. Your commitment as a Life member takes the guesswork out of knowing when it's time to renew, and it reduces our administrative costs. It is also the best value for your money, so while you are at Hook, be sure to visit the membership booth and take advantage of the discount price. For those age 60 and over, please consider converting to a Life membership as we have special rates available. For details, give our office a call at 858-689-9223.

vour vote at our website www.tailhook.net.



2024 Board of Directors Election CAPT Greg Keithley, USN(Ret)

The 2024 election cycle is underway this summer. We have no open seats to fill, but three of our current board members are eligible for a third and final term. They are CAPT Adan Covarrubius, USN(Ret), CDR Mel Palmer, USN(Ret) and CAPT Walt Slaughter, USN(Ret). Regular members have voting rights, so please participate by visiting our website and voting online. Voting will continue through 31 July with results announced at Hook '24 during our annual membership meeting. Cast

Future Hook Planning — Put These Dates on Your Calendar For future planning, Hook will be scheduled two weeks before the Labor Day weekend. Please add these dates to your calendar.

Hook '25	21–23 August 2025	Grand Sierra Resort, Reno, NV
Hook '26	27–29 August 2026	Grand Sierra Resort, Reno, NV
Hook '27	26-28 August 2027	Grand Sierra Resort, Reno, NV
Hook '28	24-26 August 2028	Location TBD

See you all in Reno!





CAPT Greg "Chaser" Keithley, USN(Ret) Executive Director The Tailhook Association



Page 10 The Hook, Summer 2024



New Collector's Edition Prints

Star Wars on Earth

Original Painting by Russell Recchion



The Painting of the Photo that Inspired the Movie "TOP GUN"

"Star Wars on Earth, the Painting, is dedicated to the legacy of the F-14 Tomcat and all those who flew, maintained, launched and recovered that magnificent aircraft."

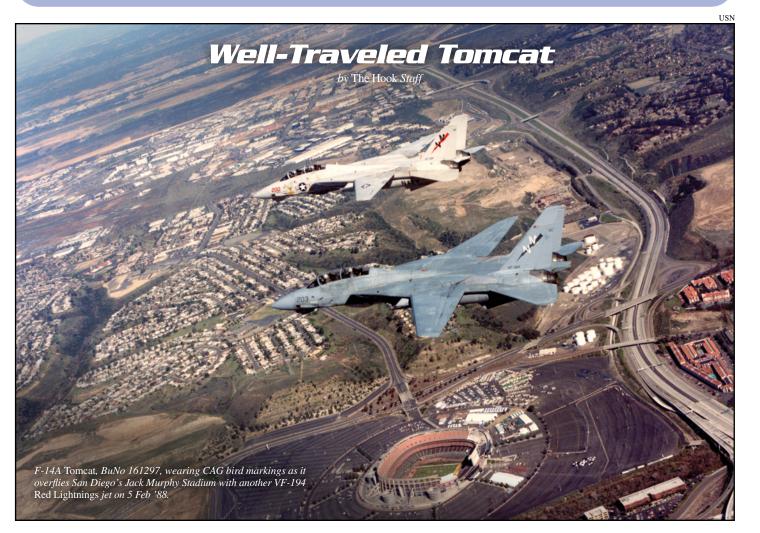
— C.J. "Heater" Heatley III



Scan this **QR Code** with your smartphone camera



AN AIRPLANE STORY



t was 1982, a year in which the Department of Defense confirmed that the F-14 *Tomcat* remain the sea service's premier fighter and USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68) returned home from a deployment during which a pair of VF-41 *Black Aces* F-14s splashed two Libyan fighters over the Gulf of Sidra. At Grumman Aerospace Engineering Corporation at Bethpage, Long Island, long the cradle of Navy fighter aircraft, F-14A, BuNo 161297, rolled off the assembly line destined for the VF-2 *Bounty Hunters*, one of the squadrons that a decade earlier became one of the first two *Tomcat* squadrons in the Navy.

It served in the squadron for the next five years, logging cruises on board USS Ranger (CV 61) and USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) before transfer to the VF-194 Red Lightnings in early 1987. It was a brief tour in a short-lived Tomcat squadron that disestablished after only 18 months of service from December 1986 through April 1988. Departing VF-194 in December 1987, BuNo 161297 joined the VF-114 Aardvarks and remained with the squadron until mid-1992. During that time, the aircraft was part of a world cruise on board USS Enterprise (CVN 65) and participated in the maiden deployment of USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72). With the pending disestablishment of VF-114, the aircraft shifted to the VF-213 Blacklions in July 1992. The following year, back aboard Lincoln, it logged Operation Southern Watch missions over Iraq and combat air patrols over Somalia as part of Operation Restore Hope.

Joining the VF-24 *Checkertails* in January 1995 for a short stint, the aircraft then spent most of the period 1996–2001 assigned to COMFITWING interspersed with short periods in the hangars of the

VF-211 Fighting Checkmates and VF-41 Black Aces. In November 2001 it joined VF-211 for a longer stay, just missing the squadron's deployment on board USS John C. Stennis (CVN 75) in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, it was aboard Enterprise with the Fighting Checkmates for the squadron' final deployment in F-14s, which included flights in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The squadron's transition to the F/A-18 Super Hornet sent BuNo 161297 to the boneyard and eventually scrapping, the aircraft having left its mark on seven Tomcat squadrons during its more than two decades of service.

Douglas E. Slowiak



BuNo 161297 in the boneyard at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., in 2005 wearing the markings from its final cruise with the VF-211 Fighting Checkmates on board USS Enterprise (CVN 65).

The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 13

MEMBERSHIP CORNER

Welcome New Tailhook Members and Life Members!

February New Members

ADJ2 John H. DeBaere, USN Veteran LCDR Peter Quintal, USN Veteran CDR Jeffrey Martin, USN(Ret) Mr. Scott Drury 1stLt Jackson Hayes, USMC LCDR Jason Moser, USN(Ret) CAPT Dan Grieco, USN(Ret) CAPT Leslie Kindling, USN CDR Charles R. Kreuz, USN Col Thomas B. White, III, USMC(Ret) Lt Col Todd Giggy, USAF(Ret)

February New Life Members

Capt Neal A. Henderson, USMC Veteran CAPT Wilton D. Bradshaw, USN(Ret) LCDR Lucas E. Babbitt, USN(Ret) CDR Greg Stearns, USN(Ret) Capt Jim Lawrence, USMC(Ret) CAPT Michael J. Horsefield, USN(Ret) LCDR William A. Stamm, USNR(Ret) CDR Jeffrey G. Scherer MD, USNR(Ret) CAPT Robert A. Miller, USN(Ret) CDR Jennifer Rigdon Teter, USNR(Ret) Mr. Wayne S. Bomar, USNR Veteran Dr. Charles Kerber, USN Veteran CAPT Bruce S. Bole, USN(Ret) CDR John Capizzi, USN(Ret) CAPT Paul O. Monger, USN(Ret) CDR Daniel V. Baxter, USN(Ret) CAPT Eldon S. Wilson, USN(Ret) LCDR Timothy E. Dinsmore, USN(Ret) LCDR Peter Chatry, USN Dr. Donald O. Quest, USN Veteran LtCol Timothy Frank, USMC(Ret) LT Richard A. Chapman, USN Veteran CDR Michael E. Pinho, USN(Ret) Capt Ronald Burke, USMC Veteran LCDR Asa V. Brown Jr., USN Veteran CDR John H. Akoury, USNR(Ret) CDR Jordan Hans, USNR CDR Harry P. Brown, USN(Ret) Maj Ronald Rasmussen, ARNG(Ret) CAPT Jeffrey Punches, USN(Ret) Ms. Stephanie Goetz

March New Members

ENS Angel Ayala, USN ENS Elisabeth O'Connell, USN ENS Mark Protze, USN ENS Hunter Arndt, USN ENS Chandler Stockton, USN ENS Patrick Gallo, USN

March New Life Members

CDR Richard N. Alheid, USNR(Ret) Mr. Albert L. Logan CDR Jason Pugh, USN(Ret) LCDR Walter C. Murken, USN(Ret) Mr. William Chiles CAPT Matthew Pringle, USN(Ret)

Lt Col T.J. Flannery, ANG(Ret) RDML John E. Dougherty, USN LCDR Philip Pirofalo, USN(Ret) Mr. Richard O. Sirola LT Race E. Betancourt, USN CAPT William J. Erickson, USN(Ret) LCDR Jake Close, USN AE2 Neill F. McCormack, USN Veteran LT Floyd M. Joramo, USN Veteran LTJG Douglas R. McClure, USN CDR Christopher W. Lester, USN(Ret)

April New Members

Mr. Tom Anderson Mr. Ben Bramblett Mr. Kevin Williams Mr. Jay Stratton AFCM William Dunigan, USN(Ret) LT Joe Catterall, RN LT Ryan Mostofi, USN LT Daniel Jones, USN LT Daniel R. Bohannon, USN CDR Richard A. Pozniak, USN ENS Kirsten A. Tate, USN LT Stryker M. Smith, USN LTJG Charlie Markert, USN LT David Taylor Jr., USN Veteran LTJG Ahad Asim, USN LTJG Caleb A. Champion, USN LT Thomas Frankenberger, USN LT Bridgette A. Hickey, USN LT Marvin B. Crisostomo, USN Dr. Karen Thomas, USN Veteran LT Brady Watson, USN ENS Maya R. Weiss, USN Mr. Stephen J. Brown, USN Veteran LT Jared Hachmeister, USN LT Autumn E. Koh, USN LTJG Stefan Lindblom, USN LTJG Robert Livolsi, USN LCDR Christopher Mather, USN Veteran LTJG Trevor J. Cheatham, USN CDR Bradley D. Storm, USN(Ret) LTJG Jake Lindow, USN LT Jay Wallen, USN CDR Charles Shamonsky, USN ENS Stephen Gaudin, USN LT Javier Reynoso, USN LT Carson Brial, USN

April New Life Members

CAPT Emil G. Gram, USN(Ret) CPT Philip C. Ecklund, USA Veteran Mr. George D. Lawrence, USMC Veteran CAPT Brent Jaquith, USN CAPT Christopher E. Sund, USN(Ret) CAPT Ralph Suarez, USN(Ret) CDR Patrick W. Carroll, USN(Ret) Mr. Arne E. Johnson CAPT Bruce Pieper, USN(Ret) CAPT Michael Van Gheem, USN(Ret)

LT Daniel S. Pruitt, USN CAPT Michael Longworth, USN(Ret) LT William A. Morgan, USN Veteran CDR Paolo J. Singh, USN CDR Kurt McClung, USN(Ret) Mr. Robert C. Forbes, USMC Veteran Mr. Bradley L. Hutter CAPT John L. Fitzpatrick, USN(Ret) LCDR Steven A. Nieto, USN LCDR Ed T. Rieke, USN(Ret) LCDR Dean W. Sibley, USN(Ret) LCDR Richard C. Parker, USN(Ret) Lt Col Michael Sadler, USAF(Ret) LtCol Timothy M. Miller, USMC(Ret) CDR Rick Uchida, USN(Ret)

May New Members

CDR R. Scott Ruppert, USN(Ret) LTJG Brendan F. Hardin, USN LTJG Timothy Bradford, USN ENS Robert A. Ferrante, USN LTJG Brian Archer, USN ENS Kyle P. Quinn, USN LTJG Toby Foelix, USN LT Patrick Urrutia, USN LTJG James B. Kimberly, USN LTJG Jake Rotzler, USN LTJG David Henney, USN LTJG Parker S. Campbell, USN LTJG Kyle G. Erlich, USN LTJG Cooper Bishop, USN LTJG Shekor C.N. Tobitt, USN 1stLt Nick Goebelbecker, USMC LCDR Gregory Morris, USN Veteran LT John Harnsberger, USN LCDR Nicholas Engle, USN Mr. Mark Kalenak Dr. Szilard Kui LT Riley Schliem, USN LTJG Carolyn E. Riggs, USN Mr. Des Murphy LT Kara Klein, USN LT Alexander Nykaza, USN LT Paul Gillcrist, USN ENS Joseph D. Crews, USN ENS Samuel J. Ott, USN ENS Will Avscue, USN ENS Michael Drake, USN ENS Chase A. Flato, USN ENS Luke Gregor, USN ENS Christopher J. Trotta, USN ENS Dillon Bright, USN ENS Caroline Steffy, USN ENS David D. Liu, USN ENS Kevin R. Wall, USN ENS Joseph Lilya, USN LT Andrew C. Hagerty, USN LT Suzanne L. Toms, USN LTJG Patrick McKernan, USN LTJG Brendan Macklem, USN

1stLt Paul R. Jervis, USMC

LTJG Livia G. Conlon, USN 1stLt Eduardo Chavez, USMC 1stLt Sean E. Moriarty, USMC LTJG Charlie Hoffmann, USN LTJG Benjamin Ryder, USN LTJG William H. Wells, USN 1stLt Sakorey Srongprapa, USMC LTJG Joseph A. McCabe, USN LTJG Harry Fulton, USN LTJG Jack Snauko, USN LTJG Alex Peralta, USN 1stLt Robert A. Vanacore, USMC 1stLt Everett S. Golenski, USMC LTJG Nathan Hersom, USN LTJG Ben Brown ,USN LTJG Austin C. Dement, USN 1stLt John Russell, USMC 1stLt Samuel Neff, USMC 1stLt Daniel Ferris, USMC LT Greg Swift, USN LT Alexander W. Miller, USN

LTJG Jonathan Beck, USN LTJG William T. Cox, USN 1stLt Andrew Bartholow, USMC 1stLt Dillon C. Rodriguez, USMC LTJG Tristan E. Daniels, USN LTJG Carson R. Hawkins, USN LTJG Quinn O'Loane, USN ENS Kevin Smith, USN LTJG David J. Wallach, USN LTJG Howard Francis, USN LTJG Piero Gardinali Garcia, USN 1stLt Natasha K. Skrypek, USMC LT Andrew Smith, USN LCDR Benjamin L. Scripture, USN Mr. Robb Mansfield, USMC(Ret) Capt John Turpit, USMC Veteran LT John Brocksopp, USN Veteran LCDR Jill Bond, USNR(Ret)

May New Life Members

PO2 Stephen M. Roberts, USN Veteran

Mr. Leonard R. Schmidt, USN Veteran CAPT Mike Welch, USN(Ret) RDML John Saccomando, USN CAPT Richard Forman, USN(Ret) LT Aidan R. Fouhy, USN Mr. Robert G. Silva Mr. Peter Wilson Mr. Thomas Hobson LT Ryan Strehlke, USN LCDR Jeff Ware, USN(Ret) CAPT Chris Dentzer, USN CDR Justin Nixon, USN LT Rebecca White, USN LCDR Thomas Kenny, USN(Ret) Mr. Lee C. Olsen LT Orion Flurett, USN

Cutoff date — 24 May 2024. All members after this date will be featured in the next issue.





Page 14 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 15



TAILHOOK EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

EFC Combined Federal Campaign No. 10251

We hope you are enjoying a peaceful and rewarding summer, and are preparing for what's sure to be an epic Hook '24 in Reno. As you know, Tailhook changed venues starting this year and will hold the annual symposium at the fantastic Grand Sierra Resort (GSR). We look forward to reconnecting with all of you there.

This set of remarks summarizes our 2024 scholarship selection results. Each year between 15 December and 1 March, your Tailhook Educational Foundation (TEF) receives exceptional scholarship applications from the best and brightest Naval Aviation legacy students. This year, scholarship committee members reviewed and scored nearly 500 applications. From these, 130 students earned TEF grants, half of them graduating high school seniors and half current college students. Six recipients were Gold Star students, and three were enlisted applicants. TEF 2024 scholarship grants again averaged more than \$4,000 per grant with one high school senior and one college student earning our top two \$15,000 grants. This year, 54 of our 130 scholarships earned awards of more than \$3,500. The table below shows TEF's 2024 high-value grants breakdown by number of grants and their associated values:

• 2 x \$15,000 • 1 x \$7,000 • 6 x \$10,000 • 3 x \$6,000 • 1 x \$9.500 • 27 x \$5.000 • 1 x \$9,000 • 6 x \$4,000 • 1 x \$7,500 • 6 x \$3,500

As we recap in our quarterly TEF remarks in The Hook magazine, without the steady contributions from our loyal Tailhook Association members, our like-minded organizational wingmen and our industry partners, TEF's scholarship program would not exist. We also recognize our tireless scholarship committee as being a critical part of our program



The Blue Angels conduct their traditional flyover during the U.S. Naval Academy graduation ceremony at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis on 24 May '24.

each year. We ask you to please review the insert on this page for the list of TEF's 12 scholarship committee members, who spent countless days and hours reviewing the 2024 applications. Bravo Zulu and our heartfelt gratitude to them all for their hard work. TEF's scholarship program would not succeed without their incredible efforts every year.

On behalf of our TEF chairman of the board, board of directors and staff, and expressly our Naval Aviation legacy superstars who earn a TEF grant each year, we genuinely thank you for your tenacious support of our foundation.

We look forward to seeing you all at Hook '24. Please stop by and see us at the TEF booth in the GSR convention center. Mahalo Nui Loa (thank you

CAPT Rodger Welch, USN(Ret)

very much) again for your continued Kokua'(generosity) and long-standing support to TEF and the Tailhook Association.





CAPT Rodger Welch, USN(Ret) Executive Director Tailhook Educational Foundation

Please join us in applauding our 12 scholarship committee members for their considerable time and energy devoted to reviewing this year's fiercely competitive high school and college scholarship applications.

When you see them, please thank them for their hard, yet rewarding work.

2024 TEF Scholarship **Application Screeners**

CAPT Tracy Barkhimer, USN(Ret) CAPT Beth "Gabby" Creighton, USN(Ret) CAPT Jack "Fingers" Ensch, USN(Ret) Mrs. Kathy Ensch CDR Melanie "Mel" Palmer, USN(Ret) CDR Steve Queen, USN(Ret) Mrs. Dee Queen CAPT Scott "High School" Sanwick, USN(Ret) Mrs. Gwen Sanwick CAPT Jack "Damien" Schuller, USN(Ret)

Alternate Screeners / Scored Application Tiebreakers

Mrs. Marta Tanaka CAPT Rodger Welch, USN(Ret)

Mrs. Barbara Driscoll CDR Greg "Shifty" Peairs, USN(Ret) CAPT Bob "Rooter" Rutherford, USN(Ret)

Ship's **Store** Tailhook Founded in 1956 T-shirts are Hook '24 Men's and available adult and youth sizes. Hook '24 T-shirt Women's Polo Front is printed with Tailhook Text & Hook Logo FLY NAVY Men's Hawaiian Shirt Men's Hawaiian Shirt Fly Navy Lapel Pin Eggshell Pilot or NFO Wings Navy Blue Pilot or NFO Wings







Grande Sand Carved Coffee 15oz Mug with Pilot Wings & Hook Cobalt. Deep Sand Carved Hook & Ship Logo and NFO wings & Hook Navy Blue

800-322-4665 tailhook.net Page 16 The Hook, Summer 2024

HOME —

[hōm] noun

A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN REST YOUR HEAD AND HEART.



WELCOME HOME!

WHEN MAKING ONE OF THE BIGGEST INVESTMENTS OF YOUR LIFE, EXPERIENCE MATTERS.

MILITARY RELOCATION PROFESSIONAL.

BRIANNE MCCALLISTER
BROKER/OWNER

CALL US AT 559.309.1178 OR VISIT TOPHOOKREALTY.COM

BRIANNE@TOPHOOKREALTY.COM | DRE # 01801687



FROM THE CATWALK

CONDUCTED BY "BOOM" POWELL

HC(AW) Eric A. Clement, US



CARRIER DEITIES

light Deck Control is a wicked, intense place. As a junior officer, I was always a little nervous waiting in there for my hot switch because the handler was a mythical figure with 900 years of sea duty, born through a catapult trough, breathed jet exhaust and chewed on stripped crossdeck pendants like licorice. If you did anything to mess up his launch and recovery flow, the handler would rip your face off and send you whimpering back to your ready room.

— CAPT J.J. "Yank" Cummings, USN(Ret)

The yellowshirt flight-deck directors stand talking to each other or through their lip mics to the little shack in the island, where their uber-gods dwell, or listening to the air boss, Zeus, over all on that deck, whose iron authority extends out to planes in the landing pattern during recoveries, watching everyone and everything from above in his glasshouse throne room high over the flight deck, ordering, scolding, complaining, warning about something he wants, doesn't like or worries him. An Old Testament god, ruling over layered worlds of lesser gods.

— Dead Men Flying, A Remembrance

- -

CHOO-CHOO TRAIN

In 1958, the VMF(AW)-542 *Tigers* flew Douglas F4D *Skyrays* from MCAS El Toro, Calif. On his first flight in a *Ford*, 1sLt Bruce Dean experienced engine problems and flew a precautionary landing approach. Having previously busted a F9F *Cougar* practicing such an approach, he kept his speed up — too much. The *Skyray* hurtled off the end of the runway and came to rest on railroad tracks in time for a train to smash into it. The impact tore away the cockpit, breaking Dean's collarbone and deploying his parachute. *Life* magazine covered the event on its pages.

When asked if he would fly again, Dean replied, "As long as they build them, I'll fly 'em." Maintainers painted the silhouette of a train on the side of squadron aircraft.

Later at MCAS Yuma, the squadron accidentally fired a 20 mm cannon into the wall of a hangar. A big red and white bull's-eye was soon painted around the hole with the accompanying words, "Who says 542 can't hit the broad side of a barn?"



A VMF(AW)-342 figers F4D-1 Skyray pictured in Jught near MCAS Et 10ro, Calif., during the 1950s.

The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 19

TUNNEL CLOSED TO TRAFFIC

In Korea, enemy trains would hole up in tunnels for the day and go to work again at dark. AD *Skyraiders* started with 500 pounders and worked their way up to 2,000 pounders in an attempt to get at the trains in their hiding places. Most of the tunnels were less than a mile long and about 10 feet wide. The technique developed was to make a fairly standard carrier approach with wheels up and flaps down — 85 to 90 knots was about right — and the drop was made right at the mouth of the tunnel. "Early on, we dropped some short, and damn near bought the farm," recalled one aviator. "The bombs would tumble, bounce into the air and explode after the time delay."

UGLY AIRCRAFT CONTEST CONTINUES

The Convair XFY-1 *Pogo* featured a pilot's seat mounted on gimbals, allowing for movement from 45 degrees forward for vertical flight to 90 degrees for horizontal flight. The turboelectric, three-bladed contrarotating propellers were 16 feet in diameter. First "flights" were tethered with the prop spinner removed and a cable attached to a crane holding the *Pogo* like a hooked fish in the event something went wrong. There were 60 hours of test flights inside a blimp hangar, followed by 70 takeoff–landing drills at NAAS Brown Field, Calif. The first conversion to horizontal flight took place on 5 November 1954. With no flaps or speed brakes, the XFY-1 could not slow down and stop efficiently. Landing was a problem, as the pilot had to look back over his shoulder and had no vertical references.

Mark Aldrich collection



LT Robert Pitner shakes hands with LT Henry Champion as LT Dennie Earles, left, and LTJG Carl Hall Jr. look on following VF-791 pilots' return to USS Boxer (CV 21) from a combat mission over Songjin, North Korea, on 4 Jul '51. They created their own Independence Day fireworks in their F4U-4 Corsairs by destroying an enemy supply train in a tunnel.





The XFV-1 pictured on its tail during evaluation of the VTOL aircraft in 1955. The aircraft featured contra-rotating propellers and was designed to take off and land vertically.

The Lockheed XFV-1 *Salmon* (not an official nickname) began flight testing with a temporary, nonretractable undercarriage with long V-legs rigged under the fuselage. Fixed tail wheels were attached to the lower pair of fins for a total of six wheels on the tail. The airplane first flew in December 1953, logging 32 flights before cancellation of the project. None of the XFV-1's flights were vertical takeoffs or landings, although transitions were made from conventional to vertical flight and back.

A turboprop could never reach the speed of a jet fighter, and the concept of a fighter on every Navy deck was dropped.

DOUBLE GOLDFISH

Pilots who ditched were awarded a small, embroidered patch to wear, unobtrusively, on their uniform.

Flying a *Sea Hurricane*, Fleet Air Arm pilot Chris Cartledge attempted his first-ever deck landing in 1943 on board HMS *Argus* (149) off Scotland. Going around on his fourth attempt, he veered to starboard off the centerline of the flight deck, and the ship's radio mast sliced three feet off his starboard wing. His aircraft slid over the side and made a graceful, curved descent into the River Clyde. A destroyer took him aboard, the crew giving him dry clothes and filling him up with gin.

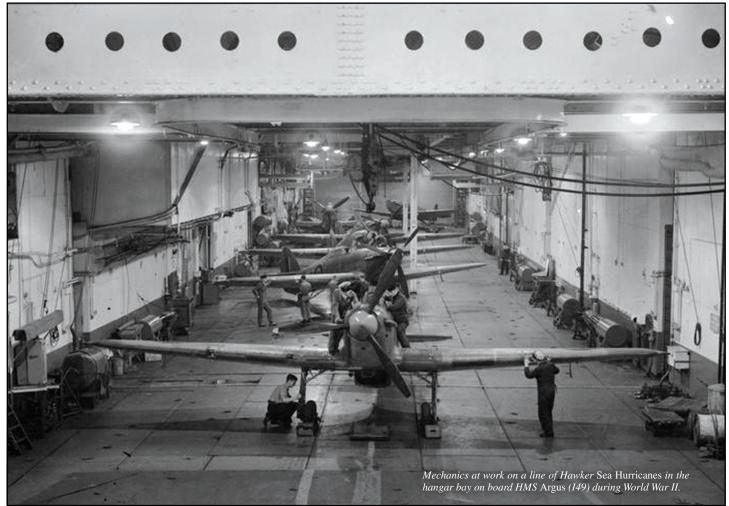
Cartledge later borrowed an unfamiliar Blackburn *Skua* in order to keep a date with a "Wren," the nickname for a member of the Women's Royal Navy Service, in Liverpool. Unfortunately, he collided with a *Seafire* while taxiing and was court-martialed. He argued that the *Seafire's* camouflage was so good that he could not see it against the background of a muddy airfield.

Cartledge then went to NAS Brunswick, Maine, to learn to fly the long-nosed, high-performance Vought *Corsair*. Eventually assigned to HMS *Formidable* (67), he flew in a strike against the German battleship *Tirpitz*, during which his wingman was shot down by heavy flak.

Formidable transferred to the British Pacific Fleet in 1945. On 17 July, anti-aircraft fire struck Cartledge's airplane as he strafed Matsushima Airfield on the mainland of Japan.



ark Aldrich collection



Page 20 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 21



He struggled back to *Formidable* and thinking his hydraulics had been damaged, he opted to bail out close aboard. Finding that he was unable to release the cockpit hood, he circled the ship waiting for her to complete emergency landing preparations, all the while continuing to try to jettison the hood. When he let go of the control column so that he could twist round and get both hands on the canopy, the *Corsair* cartwheeled and crashed into the sea. Luckily, the impact snapped Cartledge's parachute and seat straps, knocked off the canopy and threw him clear. He was picked up by an accompanying destroyer having suffered no more than a few cuts and bruises. All he remembered was coming to, floating on the water in his Mae West life jacket, and watching the last of his plane sinking under the water.

Chris Cartledge recently "went west" at the age of 100, and the above was adapted from his obituary.

WANNA RACE?

Among operational birds (not test aircraft), the Douglas A3D/A-3 *Skywarrior* may be among the fastest aircraft not equipped with an afterburner. And was there a better cross-country machine? We used to take the TA-3B from NAS Key West with eight guys and all the baggage they could carry and go to California nonstop at Mach .88. Staff officers for the Chief of Naval Operations used to tell us that Secretary of Defense Harold Brown hated their VA-3B because he would leave Andrews AFB in his C-140 *JetStar* (Mach .76 cruise) and CNO would still beat him to distant ceremonies in his special *Whale* despite leaving later in the day.

AND ANOTHER THING...

After a night launch from USS *Independence* (CVA 62) in July 1971, a RA-5C *Vigilante* had an intake ramp failure and diverted to MCAS Beaufort, S.C. The reconnaissance attack navigator recalled, "Fearing a dreaded hydraulic failure, we sped west as fast as we dared, and I started calling their tower, but didn't make contact until we were practically on a straight-in final approach. They didn't seem very welcoming to a ...

Navy jet with an emergency. In all the excitement, the pilot carried a little extra speed on approach, and we took the field arresting gear, not knowing whether our brakes and steering could be trusted. Once stopped, we shut down and carefully climbed down the back of the plane. The first thing we saw was a large puddle of red hydraulic fluid forming under the port wing. The second was the narrow angle of the arresting wire, indicating a failure of the arresting gear to survive our fast engagement. The third thing was the base commander leaping out of a jeep screaming like only a Marine colonel can. It turned out that Beaufort was scheduled for their Operational Readiness Inspection beginning at midnight, ninety minutes away, and we had just shut down — and damaged — the main runway."



Flying the Chief of Naval Operations flag above the cockpit, a VA-3B Skywarrior sits on the flight line during a visit to St. Louis, Mo., on 23 June '70.

BOUNCES

- Here's a backstory for those with time in the Philippines and experiences on the streets of Olongapo. In 1885, the Spanish Navy began construction of the *Arsenal de Olongapo*, dredging both the harbor and its inner basin and constructing a drainage canal. The plan was to make Olongapo and their Navy yard an island.
- "Yet the power inherent in his two stars sobered him. He'd known some officers to whom power became an end desirable in itself, as they rose in rank, rather than remaining a useful tool that could work miracles when properly wielded."
- —James Bassett, Harm's Way
 In the wardroom, for Midrats, a cheeseburger was a "slider," and a "Barney Clark" was a cheeseburger with a fried egg on top named in honor of the world's first artificial heart recipient.
- "The Blackburn Firebrand was built like a battleship but did not fly as well."
- My instructor never relented in his instruction, which had the quality of ceaseless pounding, so that frequently at the end of a flight my brain seemed to hang limp between my ears, twisted and bruised.

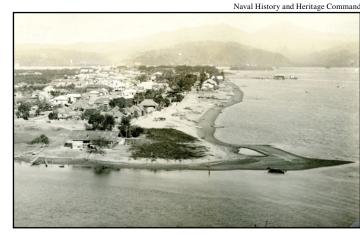
FISHEYE

"Walleye, Gladeye, Sadeye, Fisheye. The new 'I' series of weapons has been the special concern of the men and officers of NOTS China Lake. So, when CDR Waldo Born was briefed about the new hush-hush Fisheye weapon, he took the bait and went through an elaborately planned briefing and preparation for the first flight of the new weapon. Escorted out to a loaded aircraft and duly cautioned about the 'sensitive VT fuse' of the Fisheye, CDR Borne met the new weapon for the first time and nearly collapsed with laughter. The Fisheye consisted of a bathtub slung under the aircraft's wing, with the tub 'loaded' with six goldfish in water. The 'fuse' consisted of a string that would permit the water and fish to be dropped on target. The joke — witnessed by Born's squadronmates — was initiated because he had once ordered his aircraft loaded 'with everything including the kitchen sink.'"

—Naval Aviation News, *January* 1964

Right: CDR Waldo Born pictured with the bathtub that was the centerpiece of the Fisheye weapon jokingly installed on a VX-5 Vampires A-1E Skyraider. Note the handwritten note warning to not release it on the runway.

Below: A Royal Navy Blackburn Firebrand pictured in flight carrying a Mk 4 torpedo, circa 1947.



A view of Olongapo, Philippine Islands, taken in 1927. With the establishment of NAS Cubi Point and expansion of NavSta Subic Bay after World War II, Olongapo became a familiar liberty location for generations of Navy personnel.

VX 5 ORB
FISH EYE

Mark Alle



Page 22 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 23

SWEET MEMORIES

"Lots of changes happened in the 1960s. In mid-1963 the gunnery phase, the last phase in Basic at VT-3 at NAS Whiting, was dropped. No longer would prop students fly in formation while leading a flight to the overwater gunnery area to practice high-side gunnery runs on a towed banner and fire .50-cal. bullets at a fast-moving target. The joy of rolling off the perch, calling in hot, making a diving 90-degree reversal to track the banner and playing the 'Red Baron' in prop-driven trainers was gone forever. I got to do this in early 1962, and what a thrill. [I] didn't hit a thing, but what do you expect from a future S-2 pilot."

—CDR Doug Siegfried, USN(Ret)

SOME SPLICING REQUIRED

"Much of what we did in weapons development was classified, but here's an oddball, unclassified example [when] fiber optics were just being developed. A China Lake engineer wanted to determine how much fiber optic cable could be deployed from an aircraft. They developed a converted 300-gallon fuel tank into a fiber optic cable dispenser (the hardest part was figuring out how to wind the cable), then mounted that sucker on an A-7B *Corsair II* with appropriate test wiring and controls [with] one end anchored to the runway. On a pleasant Saturday morning, I manned up and flew the bird in large circles within R-2505 below 200 knots with partial flaps. I dispensed over 66 miles of fiber optic cable before the cable snapped. When I inquired what one does with 66 miles of fiber optic cable littering the complex, I was told not to worry about it!" —Paul "Booger" Valovich

National Naval Aviation Museum



Students flying the T-28B Trojan in VT-3 out of NAS Whiting Field at the time of this photograph in Feb '77 missed the opportunity to make gunnery runs in an aircraft that in performance was akin to a World War II fighter.

TRICK FLYING?

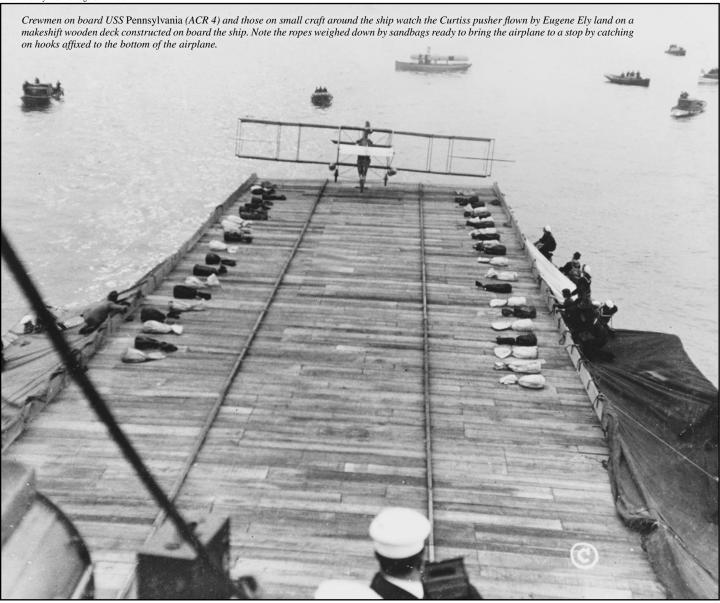
Not everyone was impressed with what Eugene Ely accomplished in performing the first shipboard landing on board USS Pennsylvania (ACR 4) on 18 January 1911. Aero, a British publication, printed this brief, scathing observation the following week. "This partakes rather too much of the nature of trick flying to be of much practical value. A naval aeroplane would be of more use if it landed on the water and could then be hauled on board. A slight error in steering when trying to alight on deck would wreck the whole machine."

Chock 'em, chain 'em, and all loose gear into the Catwalk.



Naval History and Heritage Command

Page 24





LAUNCH

The Canasta Connection by Doug Bohs Amidst the heat and humidity of the Tonkin Gulf, ordnancemen load bombs onto VA-25 Fist to the Fleet A-1H Skyraiders on board USS Midway (CVA 41) in preparation for the next launch, Jul '65.

'n March 1965, in an effort to prevent North Vietnam from using its entire military power against South Vietnam, President Lyndon ■ Johnson authorized *Operation Rolling Thunder*, a bombing campaign against selected military targets in the North. Certain areas were designated off-limits, including a 10-mile radius around Hanoi, and President Johnson also reserved sole authority over target designations within a 30-mile radius of the North Vietnamese capital.

Beginning in April, U.S. Navy and Air Force pilots (supported by reconnaissance photos) reported the construction of what appeared to be five surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites inside the restricted area. On 24 July, USAF F-4C Phantom IIs launched on a mission to strike a munitions factory west of Hanoi. After dropping their ordnance, the F-4s provided air cover for a flight of F-105 Thunderchiefs. Heading south after completing his mission, Thud pilot Capt Victor Vizcarra heard a call from one of the F-4 pilots saying, "What the hell was that?" This marked the first known SA-2 SAM fired at U.S. aircraft. The exploding 440-lb. warhead had completely destroyed one F-4 and damaged three others.

On Tuesday 27 July 1965, newly promoted Air Force Capt Frank Tullo was flying wing on Maj Bill Hosmer, the leader of a flight of four F-105s out of Korat Royal Thai Air Base. The aircraft were part of Operation Spring High, a 48-plane flight of Thuds from Korat as well as a base in Takhli, Thailand. Their mission was to destroy



National Museum of the U.S. Air Force

Page 25



When examined by photo interpreters, reconnaissance photographs shot over North Vietnam during the early stages of Operation Rolling Thunder revealed the installation of surface-to-air missile and anti-aircraft sites.

two SAM sites near Hanoi thought to have fired on the F-4s.

The Hook, Summer 2024

The Hook, Summer 2024

On his initial run Tullo saw nothing but smoke and flames from ordnance dropped previously, the sky around him full of flak from North Vietnamese anti-aircraft artillery. The flak soon found its mark, with Hosmer telling his wingman over the radio that his F-105 was on fire.

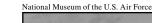
Wanting to put as much distance as possible between himself and the enemy, Tullo flew far to the west of Hanoi before ejecting. While descending he could see the city, which appeared to be between 20 and 25 miles away. After landing on a hillside in an area covered by 10-ft. tall elephant grass, he hid his parachute and organized his survival gear. He then keyed his radio and made contact with a returning flight of *Thuds*. Maj Hosmer responded and assured him they had a fix on his position and were trying to get a helicopter to him. He also told him they had spotted enemy troops to the south of his position.

Soon after hearing this news, Tullo heard a number of shots some distance from him. They stopped, but when they resumed it seemed they were much closer. Suddenly he heard voices coming up the hillside. The Air Force pilot burrowed into the elephant grass and waited. After a short time, he raised his head slightly and observed a man wearing a pointed straw hat about 50 yards away. He concealed himself again, resisting the urge to run. The enemy troops were making a lot of noise but seemed to be moving east and downhill. Waiting until he was confident the area was clear, he moved higher up the slope.

That same morning ENS Holt Livesay of the VA-25 Fist of the Fleet (tactical callsign Canasta) launched from USS Midway (CVA 41) in an A-1H Skyraider. With the proper fuel load and suggested settings of both engine and propeller, the Spad could stay aloft for an extended period of time, making it ideal for rescue combat air patrol (RESCAP). During these type missions, aircraft typically patrolled areas near where any

Above: The threat posed by Soviet-built surface-to-air missiles like this one exploding near a U.S. Air Force F-105 Thunderchief prompted targeted efforts by U.S. strike aircraft to neutralize them.

Right: Tall elephant grass provided much welcome cover for Capt Frank Tullo and other downed airman seeking to avoid capture and a reservation in the Hanoi Hilton during the Vietnam War.















A Fist of the Fleet A-1J Skyraider delivers Mk 81 bombs on a target in South Vietnam, 2 Nov '65. With its long endurance and a payload that exceeded that carried by a World War II B-17 Flying Fortress, the Skyraider proved a highly capable RESCAP platform.

U.S. aircraft would engage in ground attack activity. Upon receiving notification of a downed airman, the mission of RESCAP aircraft was to locate and establish contact. They would then escort the search-andrescue helicopter to the location of the downed pilot, and more often than not suppress enemy ground fire since the downed pilot and the helicopter were in an extremely vulnerable position during execution of the rescue.

That morning, Livesay was scheduled to fly wing on LCDR Hal Gray, but he developed engine trouble just after launch and returned to Midway. Livesay had a full fuel load that prevented him from recovering back aboard the carrier and was directed to circle overhead and wait for the 1230 launch. He would be flying wing on LCDR Ed Greathouse, who after he launched joined up on Livesay, the pair then heading for an area along the coast of North Vietnam. They remained far enough out to sea to avoid any SAMs that may be present and flew a "racetrack pattern." This was normally flown near one of the destroyers in the area, which made them available as quickly as possible for vectoring to downed airmen. The two aviators could hear the radio chatter from the Air Force pilots attacking the SAM sites near Hanoi. The airwaves were quite busy, and it did not seem the attacks were going well.

Midafternoon they received a call to proceed to the position of Capt Frank Tullo. Livesay pinpointed the location on his map and the two aviators rolled wings level, went feet dry and headed straight for his position. The Air Force pilot had been on the ground about an hour when he heard the sound of propeller-driven aircraft. Assuming these were RESCAP aircraft he keyed his radio. "This is *Dogwood Two*, do you read me?" "Dogwood Two this is Canasta and we read you loud and clear," came the response from one of the VA-25 Spads. "Transmit for bearing."

Imagine how difficult it is to spot a man in camouflage flight gear in a jungle hundreds of feet below you while you're flying at speeds between 160 and 170 mph. The terrain



National Naval Aviation Museum

Page 26 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 27 was very hilly. Maj Hosmer, still orbiting above his squadronmate, attempted to direct the VA-25 pilots to his exact location, but they could not see him. During one pass Tullo, using his survival radio, said, "This is Dogwood Two. If you look right down your wing, you'll see me. I'm looking right up your wing at you." LCDR Greathouse replied that he had spotted him. Although he actually did not see him, he did not want to worry a fellow airman deep in enemy territory. More importantly he was afraid their continuous circling would draw the enemy to him.

The Skyraider pilots informed Tullo they were going to take position some distance away from his location to await the rescue helicopter, but confirmed they would periodically check on him. The pair stayed at treetop level as they headed west to a position 10 to 15 miles farther away from Hanoi. They circled for an hour or two, returning to Tullo's location two or three times to talk to him and let him know they were still there. From their vantage point they could see North Vietnamese MiG fighters taxiing at Phuc Yen Air Base. For some reason the MiGs didn't come up after them, and they were glad they didn't. Ed. Note: The previous month, Greathouse had been one of the pilots on a four-plane flight of VA-25 A-1H Skyraiders attacked by North Vietnamese MiG-17s. Two of his *squadronmates shared a kill when they shot down one of the enemy jets.*

Having had to loiter over the ship after launch, Livesay began to worry about running out of fuel. The minimum operational revolutions per minute (RPM) suggested for operating his *Spad's* Pratt & Whitney engine was 1,400. If a pilot flew at 1,400 RPM or "max endurance," he was supposed to go back up to 2,000 RPM every 20 or 30 minutes to keep the engine from fouling. About halfway through this process, Greathouse called to Livesay on the radio. "You might want to pull the prop back to fourteen hundred RPM. [It] looks like this is going to be a long day." He responded that he had been at 1,315 RPM for the last two hours. That was as far back as the propeller control would move.

Later in the afternoon, around 1730, the VA-25 pilots received a radio call from a distant friendly aircraft that was coordinating the rescue effort. The message stated a helicopter was on the way to their position from a landing area on the edge of Laos and instructed them to fly a Courtesy of Frank Tullo

heading of 240 degrees at a specific altitude to intercept it. After several minutes they saw a CH-3C Sea King heading toward them. They turned around and flew back toward Tullo's position, this time leading the *Jolly* Green Giant, a nickname adopted from the vegetable company mascot because of the helicopter's size and paint scheme.

When the rescue assets arrived overhead, Tullo was obviously elated to hear and see them. Like the Skyraider pilots experienced earlier in the day, the helicopter crew had trouble locating the downed pilot amid tree cover that was 100 feet high and dense. Spotting him after he fired several tracers, they dropped a rescue cable with a horse collar on it. The helicopter had no "personnel" lifters, only cargo handling materials. Tullo put the horse collar over his head and under his arms and gave the signal to pull him up. He didn't realize how traumatic this effort would be once the cargo winch on the helicopter started reeling him in.

After lifting him about 10 feet, the winch jammed. The helicopter crew lowered a rope and instructed Tullo to tie it to the horse collar. He was now hanging by the horse collar dangling far above the ground but still in the treetops. At this point he could see puffs of smoke from what appeared to be small arms fire, but he was not hit.

Realizing the severity of the situation, the pilot of the helicopter, Air Force Capt George Martin, sought to find an open area where he could land and bring the downed pilot aboard. In the process, he dragged Tullo through bushes and tree limbs, nearly killing him, but the *Thud* pilot hung on and finally was lifted clear of the trees. Livesay distinctly remembers thinking, "Boy, he's going to have a hell of a ride back to Thailand on the end of that 200-foot cable.'

Unbeknownst to the Naval Aviators, Tullo was enduring a true life or death struggle. Hanging on to the horse collar with his arms, he felt as though they were about to be pulled out of his shoulder sockets. Martin soon found a small field and set the downed pilot on the ground. Tullo freed himself from the horse collar and cable, but unfortunately the field was too small to accommodate the huge helicopter, so Martin had to fly about 50 yards farther to a larger clearing. Tullo came running and dove into the open cargo bay soon after it touched down.



The best part of the long day started when they caught a ride to the Da Nang Officers Open Mess — DOOM Club — where they were able to eat a fine meal and have a few drinks. Livesay had eaten his box lunch while orbiting the ship around noon and had not given much thought to hunger during the action. The DOOM Club was a throwback to the Old West. When pilots entered, they took off their pistols or other firearms and hung them on a peg along a wall on one side of the room. The establishment was a great place for Naval Aviators. Because they operated from aircraft carriers, they were held in high esteem by the Air Force pilots, who wouldn't allow them to pay for a drink. Both VA-25 Spad drivers took advantage of the hospitality.

Livesay learned years later that 27 July 1965, was the worst day the Air Force had in Vietnam. Of the 48 aircraft that took off from Royal Thai air bases against the SAM sites around Hanoi, six were shot down. Three pilots were killed, two were captured and Capt Frank Tullo was the only one rescued.

Fast forward to a Friday night in April 1993. Holt Livesay and his wife Judy had returned home from playing bridge with some friends when their daughter asked, "Daddy, where were you July twenty-seventh, nineteen sixty five?" He felt as though he had been struck by lightning. He knew it was not Ed Greathouse asking as he had just seen him at a reunion two weeks earlier. He just knew it had to be Frank Tullo. Who else would be asking after all these years? The caller said he would call again, and he did, leading to a memorable conversation reminiscing about that exciting day.

How was Frank able to locate Holt after all these years? Following his service in the Air Force, Tullo became a chief pilot for Continental Airlines. He was always grateful to the Naval Aviators who pulled him out of the jungle and wondered who they were. All he knew from the radio traffic on the day of his rescue was the callsign of the Navy aircraft — Canasta. Whenever Frank met a Navy pilot on board his plane, he asked if they were aware of that callsign.

In the spring of 1993, he finally had an affirmative answer. VA-25 had a squadron reunion the weekend before and either a squadronmate or someone familiar with the *Fist of the Fleet* provided Frank an affirmative answer to his question. He had previously located George Martin, the helicopter pilot, and now he had found Holt Livesay and Ed Greathouse. Frank told Holt he would like to take everyone to dinner on 27 July 1995, the 30th anniversary of his rescue.

Frank made arrangements for Holt and Judy to fly standby from Norfolk to Austin, Texas. Everyone met at Ed's home and Frank made good on his promise. In 2005, they commemorated the 40th anniversary in Dayton, Ohio, with a visit to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

The men have had a special relationship over the years, one that can only be truly appreciated by those who have experienced something similar. Livesay summed it up best when he said, "Frank's rescue was to me, the most rewarding thing I did in the Vietnam War."

Ed. Note: Livesay had a unique relationship with Midway, his father having been a welder who helped build the ship at Newport News Shipbuilding. Frank Tullo's personal account of his rescue, "Tullo and the Giant," appears in the July 1997 issue of the Smithsonian Institution's Air & Space magazine.





The participants in the dramatic events of 27 Jul '65, pictured during one of their reunions, the first of which occurred 30 years to the day after the rescue mission in North Vietnam



The single bandage over his left eye is the only hint of his ordeal as Capt Tullo debriefs his shootdown and rescue.

There had been an added incentive to move quickly. There was a house in the initial clearing and its occupants had shot everything they had at him and the Jolly Green. Livesay and Greathouse provided suppressing fire at the house and against several other people who showed up to prevent the rescue. When Tullo dove into the helicopter, Capt Martin and his co-pilot were crouched over the flight controls while bullets whizzed through the chopper. The helo made short work of taking off once the rescued pilot was on board.

Now came the main job of finding the way back to the Air America Lima Site from which the Jolly Green had taken off. It was atop a mountain, and the enemy controlled the lower elevations and the land around it. This was Martin's first day up there, having just arrived from South Vietnam. He was so new to the environment that he had not been provided flight maps or charts of the area. When he was sent on this mission, he was told only a direction and altitude to fly and that he would be met by a couple of Skyraiders.

The helicopter did not fly as fast as the *Spads*, so it took a while to get back to his Lima Site, and daylight was beginning to diminish by the time they arrived. By this point, Livesay had been in the air over seven hours, which ordinarily wouldn't have been a problem had he not burned extra fuel early in the mission. He had calculated how much fuel he would need to get back feet wet out over the Tonkin Gulf. He thought it would be a bonus to make it back to the ship but was also confident that if he made it out over water and had to ditch, one of Midway's embarked helicopters would be able to pick him up. He had not yet reached what was considered a critical fuel state, but it was fast approaching.

With the helicopter successfully returned to Lima Site, Livesay and Greathouse headed back across North Vietnam at night. As they approached the coast, they called Midway to announce their position and provide an estimated time of arrival overhead. "Schoolboy [Midway] has shut down flight operations for the day," came the reply. "Bingo to Da Nang [South Vietnam]." Livesay suspected that since they had been gone for so long, Air Ops thought they may have been shot down or were otherwise on the ground. There was nothing left for the Spad drivers to do but change course and head for Da Nang over 200 miles to the south.

At this point Greathouse passed the lead to Livesay, as it generally takes less fuel to fly lead than to fly on someone else's wing. They flew southward in the pitch dark until within radio range of Da Nang. The normal communication procedure was to request permission to land and identify the "duty" runway. Livesay had been to Da Nang a few times before and knew the main runway was north-south. He called a state of emergency with his low fuel state and indicated that he was making a straight-in approach from the north. There were no questions asked and the two weary aviators landed at 2145, with Livesay having been airborne for 10 hours and 45 minutes. They taxied in, parked their aircraft as directed and shut down the engines. Livesay had an indicated 200 pounds of fuel left, knowing the VA-25 maintenance people had told him the fuel gauges were not accurate within 200 pounds! They asked the tower at Da Nang to call Midway and inform the ship they were safely on the ground and would be back tomorrow.

The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 28 Page 29



"Who's Sleeping with Bug Roach's Jacket?" Reflections on Hook '23

by Bonnie Towne







Examined from any angle, the flight jacket of CDR John "Bug" Roach is a window into his career and unique personality.

o, who's sleeping with Bug Roach's jacket?" I scanned my surroundings for a moment before realizing that the cheerful young lieutenant standing in front of the exhibit booth was referring to me and the battle-hardened flight jacket of legendary Naval Aviator and LSO CDR John "Bug" Roach. I raised my hand slowly.

We briefly discussed my position as the National Naval Aviation Museum's (NNAM) "keeper of the jacket." While I traveled to Reno prepared to provide security and reverent care for an irreplaceable artifact, I quickly realized that I had an opportunity for an even greater role, caring for the legacy of the man who once wore it. This endeavor seemed the least I could do while Bug's flight jacket and I shared quiet happy evenings together in Room 814 at The Nugget.

On the morning of my first day as a volunteer researcher at NNAM, while contemplating the vast archives of Naval Aviation history and culture within its walls, I pulled a random cruise book off the shelf in the library, one that covered the 1969–1970 combat deployment of USS *Ranger* (CVA 61) off Vietnam. I reverently opened the olive drab front cover and at the top was a quote by the writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. The inscription read, "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man ... Let a man, then, know his worth, and keep things under his feet." True to my nature, I dutifully wrote down these first words in my small green memo book, certain one day I would have occasion to use them. Five years later, that day had come.

Over time, I would come to understand that the length of the shadow of each person's influence on Naval Aviation is a function of many factors, including time in service, skill, opportunity, uncanny good luck, brutal bad luck, ambition, intellect, personality, or things I had not considered. As a result, some would cast a long dark late afternoon shadow on Naval Aviation, while others would bear the unspeakable weight of a shadow cast one minute past high noon.

At Hook '23, I began gathering accounts of Bug's life and career directly from those who knew him. My goals were to understand why men were quick to laugh upon merely hearing his name, why they spoke with warmth and deep respect in their voice when they recalled their acquaintance, why one man stepped away alone and openly wept after snapping a photo of Bug's picture, and why multiple others choked back unapologetic emotion as they



Bonnie Towne visits with CAPT Jack "Fingers" Ensch, USN(Ret) during Hook '23.

The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 31

graciously answered my questions. All these things occurred under the silent powerful gaze of the flight jacket at Booth 102.

While talking with Bug's friends, I quickly became uncomfortable focusing solely on questions about him. While I stayed the unsettling course, I was painfully aware that, like Bug, each of the men I questioned had deep rich lives and extraordinary contributions to Naval Aviation. Clearly, the truth of Bug's legacy was more complex than the actions and life of a single man. I knew that an essential element of my inquiry must include reflections on the service of the men I interviewed and what they valued. After all, it is the living who determine who among their ranks are called legends.

Saturday afternoon, after exhausting the supply of Bug's friends inclined to stare at his jacket — as if on cue — I encountered the last of the many smiling lieutenants who visited my booth. I asked if he recognized the name "Bug" Roach. He answered with a laugh. "Yes, of course. I'm an LSO." We briefly chatted about the many references to Bug's exceptional skill at the LSO School at NAS Oceana. As an afterthought, just before the young officer walked away, I asked why he became an LSO. He paused for a moment and as his voice softened, he leaned slightly forward as if to tell me a thing so precious no one else should hear his words. In a calm metered voice, he offered a single sentence. "I became an LSO because they are the keepers of the secrets of carrier aviation." Staying true to my nature, I quickly memorialized his words on a scrap of paper. Soon after, I watched this philosopher incarnation of a young Bug disappear into the exhibit hall crowd.

That night I went back to the room I shared with Bug's jacket to reflect on my many conversations. As I reviewed my scribbled notes, my eyes kept returning to that young lieutenant's words. "HoBo," without any intention, had unequivocally ended my inquiry about the legacy of Bug Roach or any other carrier pilot with a single sentence. I opined I could ask a hundred more friends of Bug about his life, and I would not be one moment closer to a pure understanding of his legacy. I know this with absolute certainty because I too am the keeper of a secret. It is a secret of those with a common purpose, who share the risk of death and the joy of life with equal ease, a hallmark of my fellow Marines, those who greet one another with the phrase "Semper Fidelis."

Clearly the power of an LSO is not that they keep the secrets of carrier aviation, but rather that they whisper them on moonless angry nights and calm sunny days to men and women challenged by circumstance, either of their own making or beyond any measure of their control. So

too is life in the Corps with its unique language only we are privileged to understand. The hard truth is the most eloquent words will not illuminate a single thing of real importance on the subject of our fidelity to one another or what we are able or willing to do to demonstrate the same.

I've come to understand that in Naval Aviation, as in the Marine Corps, there is no distortion of the words conveyed from person to person or from generation to generation. Our unique precious languages retain their crisp concise power whether spoken in 2023, 1923 or 1823. Our respective languages remain a mystery to those on the outside as they are born from the heart of what we collectively value and what we willingly offer in service to those ends. Whether we find ourselves grim faced and clenching on a dark stormy night behind a carrier's wake, hearing the alert of a missile warning over Hanoi or pinned by sniper fire behind a crumbling wall in Fallujah, our respective long shadows whisper their fierce shared secret — "You are not alone." It is the knowledge we are not alone, either physically or in spirit, that allows individuals to cloak themselves in the protective shield of the courage of many. It is the serene weight of this shared courage that allows one to rise to the moment with stalwart grace in the face of sometimes staggering uncertainty, fear or danger whether in combat or training.

Γailhook



The 1,000-trap milestone is cause for celebration on board USS Ranger (CV 61) in 1991. Left to right RDML Ron Zlatoper, LCDR "Tugg" Thomson, CDRs John "Bug" Roach and Denby Starling and CAPT Jay Campbell appropriately holding up rabbit ears.





Tailhook

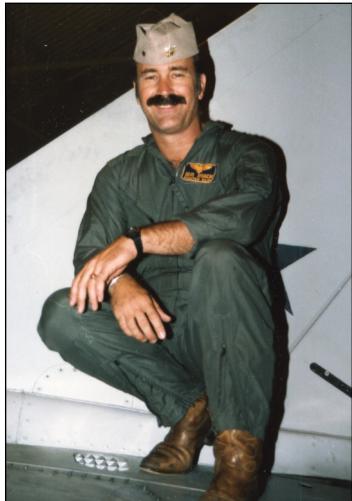
Bug Roach whispered the secrets known only to carrier aviators an astounding 130,000-plus times to many guided by his steady knowing voice. He was able to balance the high demands of his profession with the joy and exuberance of embracing the moment, regardless of the place or circumstance. He took genuine delight in being in the company of those who shared his joy and whom he was honored to call his friends. His legacy is his exacting, selfless and generous commitment to the professional advancement of those whom he guided from the LSO platform in all weather, day and night.

While this Naval Aviation story is close to an end, it does not end now. When asked how Bug would feel about his flight jacket being on display at Hook or the Friday night mixer bearing his name, everyone reported Bug would be embarrassed, many said deeply. I am not surprised. Certainly, anyone in this small elite community would have a shocking lack of self-awareness if they held themselves above the staggering talent routinely walking the halls at the symposium or on the decks of aircraft carriers around the world.

At the risk of presuming I am in any way qualified to speak for Bug Roach, I believe he would want me to point out one important thing on his behalf; since I am the roommate of his jacket that is. While he may succumb to human nature and be flattered to be called a legend, I believe he would not let a label implying he was unique in his skill stand without strong protest. I want to believe he would be just and point out the countless long shadows of his peers and mentors who whispered the hallowed secrets of carrier aviation to him. He would no doubt speak the names of many of the men I spoke with at Hook or who others spoke about to me.

Such is the enduring nature of Naval Aviation — one person to the next, one generation to the next — with the long shadows of individual men and women, past and present, uniting to form an institution impenetrable. Armed with this knowledge, Bug cast his towering shadow with professional generosity and personal exuberance over all who knew him, while simultaneously reveling and finding shelter in the kindred shadows of others.

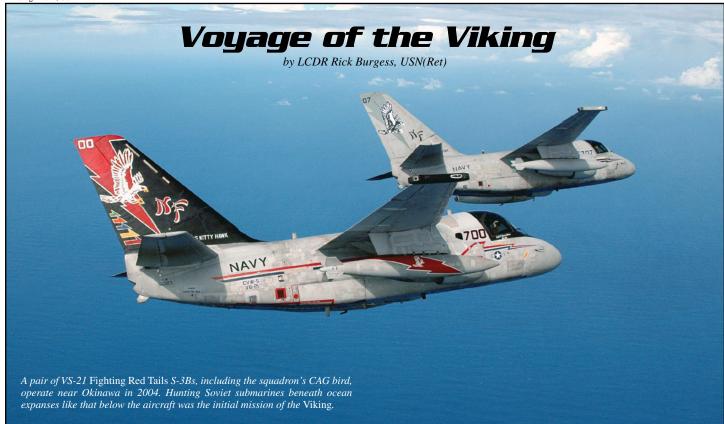
There are no do-overs in life, but if there were, I would claim one now. I would imagine the Thursday morning lieutenant approaching Booth 102 again and asking, "So, who's sleeping with Bug Roach's jacket?" This time I would not raise my hand slowly. I would not raise my hand at all. I would answer with unflinching conviction about the continuing legacy he left. "We are all sleeping with Bug Roach's jacket."



CDR John "Bug" Roach wears his signature non-regulation cowboy boots, circa 1989. His legacy lives on each year at Hook with the reading of his prayer and the renowned mixer that bears his name.

Page 32 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 33

Jim Sullivan



his year marks the 50th anniversary of the delivery of the S-3A *Viking* to the VS-41 *Shamrocks* at NAS North Island in February 1974. "We have been trying to do an impossible task with inadequate equipment," said new Commander, Antisubmarine Warfare Wing Pacific RADM James B. Stockdale, who just a year earlier had returned from captivity in North Vietnam. "Now we have a tool to do the job."

The *Viking* Association will mark this noteworthy occasion with a reunion in San Diego in October 2024. While the aircraft that association members flew and maintained was originally designed to serve as the CVW's dedicated anti-submarine warfare (ASW) platform, during more than 35 years of service, it evolved into one of the most flexible assets on the flight deck. It performed missions in surface and subsurface warfare, armed surface reconnaissance, electronic surveillance, tanking and more. Fleet squadrons operated from NAS North Island, NAS Jacksonville and NAF Atsugi, Japan, before the decision to retire the community as the CVW composition evolved.

On 22 January 2009, the S-3 retired from fleet service with the deactivation (officially 31 March 2009) of the VS-22 *Checkmates*. Sea Control Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet followed in March 2009. The *Viking* had completed its last carrier deployment in December 2007, but in late July 2008, four S-3Bs assigned to VS-22 flew to Al Asad Air Base in Iraq. Equipped with Lockheed Martin AAQ-25 Low-Altitude Navigational and Targeting-Infrared for Night-Extended Range (LANTIRN-ER) pods, the *Vikings* made their last foray to war to conduct nontraditional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (NTISR) missions for Coalition forces in *Operation Iraqi Freedom* (OIF).

Hunting insurgents in the desert was a far cry from the original role of the S-3. The *Viking* proved up to the task, cementing a reputation as a versatile, if not classic, warplane, but its reputation had a rough start. The concept of a modern, jet-powered, computerized aircraft to replace the piston-engine Grumman S-2 *Tracker* promised to revolutionize carrier-based ASW in the same way that the computerized P-3C version of the

An S-3A assigned to the VS-30 Diamondcutters pictured at NAS Oceana on 25 Sep '76. VS-30 was the first carrier-based squadron to detect a Soviet Papa-class submarine and the first fleet Air-Antisubmarine Squadron to launch a Harpoon missile.

D14B

NAS Oceana on 25 Sep '76. VS-30 was the first carrier-based squadron to detect a Soviet Papa-class submarine and the first fleet Air-Antisubmarine Squadron to launch a Harpoon missile.

Lockheed *Orion* advanced the sophistication of land-based maritime patrol and ASW capabilities. But the reality proved disappointing initially, and the *Viking* was a long time in building a solid reputation.

The Navy initiated a program in 1964 to replace the *Tracker*, awarding Lockheed the contract to develop a new platform, initially designated VSX, in August 1969. The effort benefited from the digital data-processing system on the P-3C entering service that year. The S-3's mission AYK-14 computer shared many software features of the P-3C and in some ways was more advanced. It featured "waterfall" monochrome digital displays of acoustic sensor information rather than the AQA-7 with its rolling paper gram displays. In fact, the S-3's mission system later was adapted to the CP-140 *Aurora*, the Canadian version of the P-3C.

The four-man crew of the S-3A included three officers — a pilot, copilot, tactical coordinator (TACCO) — and a sensor operator (SENSO), a position normally filled by an enlisted aircrewman. In addition to the OL-82 acoustic system, the crew operated the APS-116 search radar, the ASQ-81 magnetic anomaly detection system, the ALR-47 electronic support measures (ESM) system and the OR-89 infrared sensor turret. The S-3 could launch sonobuoys from 60 externally loaded tubes and carried four Mk 46 torpedoes or a nuclear depth bomb in its bomb bay. Two external wing pylons could accommodate rockets, mines, bombs and fuel tanks.

The first of two YS-3A prototypes made its maden flight in January 1972. Six preproduction S-3As followed for use in development and trials activity. Following the acceptance of the type by VS-41, the Fleet Replacement Squadron, the VS-21 *Redtails* were the first fleet squadron to make the transition to the *Viking*, completing the switch from the S-2 in October 1974. They took the new jet on its first carrier deployment in June 1975 to the Mediterranean on board USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67).

Lockheed completed production of 187 S-3As in August 1978, two years after the S-2G was retired from the fleet. The *Viking* eventually filled 15 fleet squadrons, which deployed aboard carriers as part of the CV concept. Beginning in 1970, the Navy began shifting ASW squadrons from its old *Essex*-class carriers dedicated to that mission and combined them with the attack carrier air wing. Not everyone welcomed the CV concept. The ASW aircraft crowded the carrier deck and added

the mission to the ship, which hitherto had been dedicated to strike and air defense. The cool reception was not lost on the S-3 crews.

The fact that the airplane had a co-pilot made it less popular among S-3 pilots, who had to share traps with other, sometimes more senior, co-pilots. An early initiative to resolve this problem was to train TACCOs in piloting to occupy the co-pilot's seat and function as co-pilot/tactical coordinator (COTAC) with enough skill to help with emergencies and routine flying, while also contributing to the tactical ASW mission. Eventually the *Viking* routinely flew as a single-piloted aircraft, although its dual-pilot capability certainly was an advantage for squadron pilot training flights.

The S-3's sophisticated mission systems experienced growing pains in the carrier environment. Often the mission computer would "dump" during the stress of the catapult shot, forcing the crew to take time to reload the software program. The Navy, in its S-3 procurement program, had insufficiently funded spare parts for the aircraft, and its mission readiness during its initial operations suffered accordingly.

Unlike the P-3, the S-3A, in its early years, rarely encountered Soviet submarines in the normal course of deployments. This contributed to the air wing's poor perception of the *Viking's* usefulness.

All of these factors did little to enamor CVWs with the new *Viking*. For example, during the aircraft's Western Pacific deployment in 1979–1980 on board USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63), the VS-21 *Redtails* operated from NAS Cubi Point, Philippines, for much of the deployment to free up deck space for the rest of the air wing.

On that deployment, however, VS-33 operated the first US-3A carrier onboard delivery (COD) aircraft, a conversion from one of the preproduction S-3As. The US-3A could carry three to six passengers, depending on the version, and haul 5,750 pounds of cargo, 2,000 of it in two pods on wing stations. The US-3A's debut proved fortunate for the Navy when it began routine operations in the Arabian Sea in 1979 during the Iranian hostage crisis. It was the only COD aircraft that could reach the northern areas of that body of water from the air base on the island of Diego Garcia south of India. Eventually, five additional US-3As were modified from S-3As. The US-3A served until retirement in 1994.





Page 34 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 35

National Archives National Archive



One of the US-3As was modified from a KS-3A, one of the preproduction aircraft modified in 1973 with a hose-and-reel aerial refueling system in the aft fuselage. No further Vikings were so modified, but VS-41 tested the KS-3A extensively, and on at least one occasion was assigned a mission of extending the range of land-based S-3As dispatched to track a Soviet ballistic-missile submarine off the coast of California.

Once the spare parts shortage was alleviated and S-3 carrier operations improved, the aircraft became valued for its sophisticated ASW capability. It was also a capable surface surveillance platform because of its sensors, long range, endurance and highly responsive performance.

With the growing strength of the Soviet fleet, including impressive surface combatants armed with long-range cruise missiles, the Navy in 1981 embarked on a Weapon System Improvement Program to transform the ASW aircraft into a formidable anti-surface strike aircraft. The resulting S-3B — a modification of the existing S-3A — first flew in 1984 and featured the APS-137 inverse synthetic aperture radar (ISAR), which could image ships with enough resolution to identify them by class. The S-3B also featured the ALR-76 ESM system, OR-263 infrared sensor turret, ALE-39 chaff/flare dispenser, the UYS-1 acoustic processor and the ARR-78 acoustic receiver (with an expanded sonobuoy channel capability). The S-3B's main punch was the AGM-84 Harpoon cruise missile, which gave the aircraft the ability to strike targets at ranges over the horizon, adding significant value to the carrier air wing in the Cold War.

The S-3B entered service with the VS-27 Sea Wolves, the Fleet Readiness Squadron, in December 1987 and became operational with the VS-30 Diamondcutters in July 1988. The VS-31 Topcats took the new version on its first deployment in March 1990. A total of 119 S-3As were converted to the S-3B configuration by September 1994, supplanting the S-3A in fleet service by 1993.

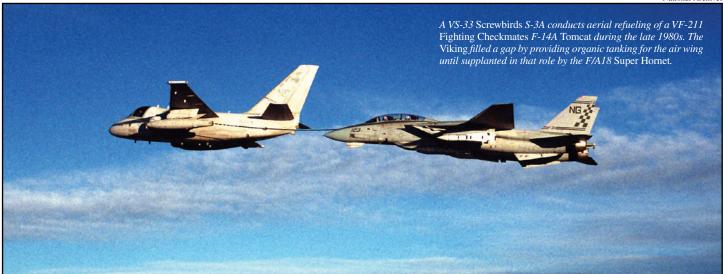




With its magnetic anomaly detection boom extended, a VS-32 Maulers S-3A conducts an anti-submarine warfare mission from USS America (CV 66) on 6 May '82. National Archives



The introduction of the S-3B expanded the capabilities of the Viking in support of the CVW, making it an over-the-horizon strike platform employing the AGM-84 Harpoon missile like that carried by this VS-31 aircraft over the Persian Gulf on 1 Mar '93.



The value of the Viking further increased beginning in 1984 with the addition of an aerial organic tanking capability. The Sargent Fletcher A/A42R-1 buddy store could transfer 11,000 pounds of fuel to other aircraft, giving the Viking a new role as a tanker to augment A-6E and KA-6D Intruders and A-7E Corsair IIs. In 1988 VS-37 Sawbucks S-3As were the first to deploy with tanking capability.

The Viking provided ASW protection routinely to carrier battle groups in the Mediterranean, Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. It was in the former that a Viking received tasking for a most unusual mission for a warplane. On 13 September 1987, agents from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation captured Fawaz Younis, a terrorist implicated in the 1985 hijacking and destruction of a Jordanian airliner. The terrorist was taken from a yacht to a U.S. Navy ship, transferred to USS *Saratoga* (CV 60) and flown to the United States in a 13-hour nonstop flight tied up in the avionics bay of a VS-30 Viking. He was convicted and imprisoned.

The Cold War ended just as the Viking reached an impressive level of war-at-sea capability and had earned widespread respect within the carrier aviation community. Yet, the versatile airplane had more roles to perform.

The Viking saw its first combat in 1991 during Operation Desert Storm. Although used primarily in support roles for surface surveillance and communications relay, VS-22 and VS-30 used the S-3B's ESM system as a threat warning system. S-3Bs also hunted for Scud ballisticmissile mobile launchers and launched ADM-141 Tactical Air-Launched Decoys to confuse air-defense networks. The APS-137B ISAR proved valuable in identifying Iraqi naval craft for targeting by strike aircraft. A VS-32 S-3B crew, using visual targeting, destroyed an Iraqi gunboat with three 500-lb. Mk 82 bombs and a buddy store. A VS-24 Scouts S-3B crew also destroyed a patrol boat with Mk 82s using radar targeting. Another VS-24 S-3B, using radar and forward-looking infrared (FLIR)





An S-3A assigned to the VS-37 Sawbucks traps aboard USS Independence (CV 62) during Operation Desert Shield on 1 Dec '90. The subsequent Desert Storm air campaign marked the first combat missions for the Viking.

targeting, attacked a Silkworm surface-to-surface missile site and an antiaircraft site with Mk 82s.

In April 1991, a new version of the Viking, the ES-3A Shadow, took flight. A total of 16 S-3As were modified into this electronic reconnaissance configuration to replace the Douglas EA-3B Skywarrior on carrier decks. The ES-3A kept the APS-137 ISAR, ALR-76 ESM and OR-263 infrared systems. However, the ASW systems gave way to a sophisticated electronic reconnaissance suite based on the EP-3E Aries II's mission suite, derived by the Naval Avionics Center in Indianapolis, Ind. The co-pilot flight controls were removed, and the station was converted to a position for the electronic warfare combat coordinator. In the rear, two electronic warfare operator positions were installed.

Two new squadrons, the VO-5 Sea Shadows and VO-6 Black Ravens, established in April and August 1991 for the Pacific and Atlantic Fleets, respectively. Typically, ES-3As deployed in two-plane detachments in each carrier air wing. This proved particularly valuable in the Balkans in overland electronic surveillance during the mid-1990s and in *Operation* Southern Watch (OSW) over Iraq. The ES-3A's participation in Operation Desert Fox combat operations over Iraq in December 1998 turned out to be its last deployment. It was deemed too expensive to upgrade its mission systems to Joint Signals Intelligence Architecture, leading to its retirement in August 1999 after a seven-year career.

During the 1990s the Viking was heavily employed in surveillance and refueling roles in the Adriatic in support of operations over Bosnia and in the Persian Gulf region in support of OSW. The designation VS changed from Air-Antisubmarine Squadron to Sea Control Squadron in 1993 in recognition of its multimission capabilities. With the retirement of the A-6 in 1997, the S-3B and ES-3A became

the CVW's only organic refueling assets.





An ES-3A Shadow assigned to VX-1 pictured on the flight deck of USS Saratoga (CV 60) during NATO exercise Display Determination '92. This modification of the Viking provided electronic reconnaissance capabilities to the CVW that were formerly the domain of the EA-3B Skywarrior.

Page 36 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 37

In 1998 the Navy decided to remove the ASW and mining missions from the S-3 community and instead rely on land-based P-3 Orions and ship-based SH-60F (and later MH-60R) Seahawk helicopters for protection of carrier battle groups. The ASW systems were removed (including 44 of the 60 sonobuoy chutes) and the SENSO crew station eliminated. A crew of three, but often only two, would fly the S-3Bs.

The S-3B also underwent several piecemeal modifications and proofof-concept demonstrations that affected a limited number of aircraft. Several were modified to fire AGM-65F *Maverick* air-to-surface missiles to counter minor naval threats. These aircraft initially deployed to the Persian Gulf with VS-22 for OSW. Under the *Outlaw Viking* program, the over-the-horizon airborne sensor information system (OASIS) was installed on one S-3B that shuffled between squadrons. OASIS integrated target information into a single picture and transmitted the situation to a battle group commander.

Under the Gray Wolf program, one S-3B was equipped with a modified cargo pod that housed a Norden APG-76 synthetic aperture radar (SAR) with a ground moving target indicator and the tactical airborne digital camera system. The radar imagery could be transmitted by datalink to a commander and recorded for post-flight evaluation. The standoff capability offered by this sea-based surveillance targeting attack radar system concept was similar to that used by the Air Force's E-8 Joint strategic attack targeting system. Several squadrons flew the Gray Wolf S-3B in exercises.

The S-3B performed its usual refueling and surveillance missions in Operation Desert Fox in December 1998, Operation Allied Force in early 1999 and continued OSW missions through March 2003. After the terrorist strikes of 9/11, when *Operation Enduring Freedom* began, carrier battle groups launched the longest overland strikes in history beginning in October 2001. The Viking's role as a tanker was essential to the success of the aerial campaign by extending the range of F/A-18 *Hornet* (and later Super Hornet) and EA-6B Prowler sorties over Afghanistan.

PHAN Kristopher Wilson, USN



An S-3B Viking assigned the VS-22 Fighting Checkmates roars off the waist catapult of USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) for an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance mission over Iraq on 16 Jan' 05. The final missions of the S-3's career involved detecting improvised explosive devices that threatened Coalition forces.

In 2001 the Navy deployed the Surveillance System Upgrade (SSU) on one S-3B. This added the APS-137B ISAR with SAR ground-mapping imaging and the capability to send detailed imagery aligned with the Global Positioning System (GPS) to a commander or strike aircraft via Link 16 datalink. The aircraft deployed with the VS-35 Blue Wolves on board USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) in 2001 and transferred to VS-24 on board USS Enterprise (CVN 65) and the VS-29 Dragonfires on board USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). It operated with great success overland in Iraq. In 2003, a Wescam AXS-6 electro-optical turret and a signals intelligence intercept system were installed on another S-3B under the SSU program, which ended in 2004 without further production.

The Navy continued to improve the potency of the Viking, adding a land-attack capability in the form of the AGM-84H/K Standoff Land Attack Missile-Expanded Response and increasing the number of Vikings capable of launching the Maverick missile. These improvements, installed under the *Maverick* plus program, first deployed in 2003. Other improvements included the AYK-23 digital mission computer, GPS and the Carrier Aircraft Inertial Navigation System II.

The S-3B squadrons performed familiar roles in OIF, which began in March 2003. On one occasion in the opening phase of the war, a VS-38 Red Griffin S-3B fired a Maverick missile in combat for the first time, striking a vessel inland near Basra. During that year, the initial deployments of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, with a tanking capability that allowed aircraft with buddy stores to accompany a strike formation, marked the beginning of the end for the S-3B force structure. Generally, as a carrier air wing acquired a Super Hornet squadron, it gave up its S-3B squadron.

The transition of OIF to a low-intensity conflict brought the threat of improvised explosive devices (IED) to Coalition ground forces in Iraq. Many strike aircraft, with their electro-optical targeting systems, operated in a new role of NTISR to hunt for IEDs and the insurgents planting them. With the retirement of the F-14 Tomcat, the Navy had AAQ-14 LANTIRN pods available for further service. The LANTIRN, operated by the COTAC, was installed on the starboard wings of 13 S-3Bs, initially with the VS-32 Maulers in 2006 on board Enterprise. An extended range version of the LANTIRN was tested on a VS-31 S-3B and deployed with VS-32 in 2007 during the aircraft's last carrier deployment.

Ground commanders in Iraq valued the LANTIRN-equipped S-3Bs for their electro-optical surveillance capabilities, enhanced by the aircraft's high endurance, for road-reconnaissance missions.

As Viking carrier deployments wound down, some aircraft went on detachments to the Caribbean to conduct drug-interdiction patrols. They were vital in supplementing P-3 coverage diminished by fatigue-life issues in the *Orion* force.

VS-32 took the Viking on its last major carrier deployment, returning home on 15 December 2007, on board Enterprise. VS-22 took the S-3B to sea for the last time in April 2008 on board USS George Washington (CVN 73) as the carrier transferred from the East Coast to the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The Viking's last shipboard venture ended on 29 May 2008. VS-22's LANTIRN-ER detachment to Al Asad, Iraq, returned home on 15 December 2008.

PH3 Joshua Karsten, USN



A view from a VS-30 S-3B Viking down the flight deck of USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67) as the aircraft taxis into launch position for a mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom on 17 Sep '04. This marked the final deployment for the Diamondcutters, which like many S-3 squadrons completed its service with combat cruises during the Global War on Terror.

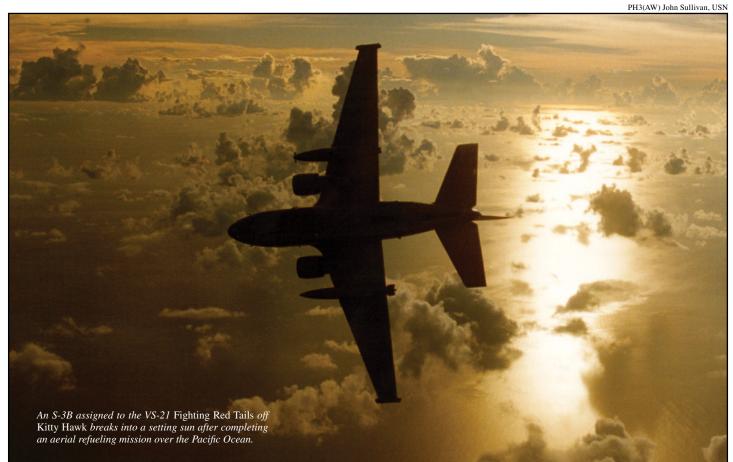


The Viking's naval career ended with plenty of life left in the aircraft, and a respectable surveillance and combat capability. Acquisition of the S-3 force by the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Forest Service and foreign customers such as Chile and Taiwan have been proposed, but no transfers have materialized. One S-3B was transferred to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2004. It was reconfigured in 2006 for such roles as atmospheric research work, development of reliable radio communications, hyperspectral imaging and environmental research. As the last S-3 in operation, it was retired in 2021 after 16 years of NASA service.

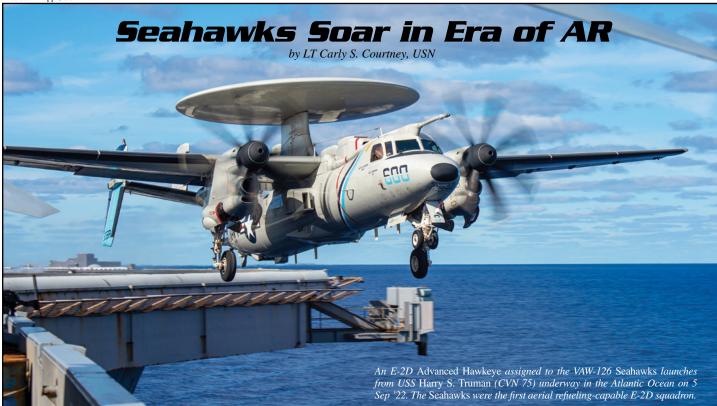
Ed. Note: A similar version of this article by Rick Burgess appeared in the October 2008 issue of Air International magazine and the Winter 2008 issue of The Hook. Special thanks to CAPTs J.P. Kelly USN(Ret) and Ed Turner USN(Ret), CDR Doug Siegfried, USN(Ret), and Ed Turner USN(Ret), CDR Doug Siegfried, USN(Ret),
Jason Tarrant and Nancy Smith Kilkenney, whose writings were helpful in updating the article.



The last flying S-3B, pictured at Gillespie Field on 13 Jul '21, was operated by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration



The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 39 Page 38



n 14 August 2020, the VAW-126 Seahawks made history as the first E-2D Advanced Hawkeye squadron to become aerial refueling (AR) capable. In development by Northrop Grumman for years, this capability made the already formidable stationing capabilities of the efficient turboprop-driven Hawkeye nearly limitless. VAW-126 qualified its first two pilots on the U.S. Air Force KC-10 Extender, but the aircraft are capable of refueling on a variety of platforms, including the KC-130 Hercules, Omega 707, F/A-18 Super Hornet and the challenging boomto-drogue adaptor (BDA)-equipped KC-135 Stratotanker. This ensures that no matter the time or theater, VAW-126 can keep its crews on station and provide the air wing with the Hawkeye's valuable capabilities.

The Squadron

Established on 1 April 1969, VAW-126 celebrated its 55th anniversary just days before personnel embarked USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75) for Tailored Ship's Training Availability as part of our Optimized-Fleet Response Plan schedule. The *Advanced Hawkeye* squadron is an integral part PHAN Christopher P. Stoltz, USN



Established in 1969, VAW-126 has a storied history, including service in Operation Desert Storm and patrols during Operation Southern Watch. In this photograph, LTJG Tara Golden monitors a radar screen during a mission over the Persian Gulf on 25 Apr '01.

of the carrier strike group, participating in a variety of operations such as air intercept control, strike control, surface search and coordination, search-and-rescue coordination and tactical command and control. The *Seahawks* earned the Battle "E" and Safety "S" on their very first deployment in 1970. This legacy has continued to impress a unique measure of professionalism and efficiency upon air wings in which the squadron has served, during which the *Seahawks* have garnered 12 more Battle "E" awards and numerous honors recognizing airborne early warning excellence.

As the first AR-capable *Hawkeye* squadron to deploy, the *Seahawks* completed 526 successful plugs on a variety of platforms while underway in 2022–'23. The vast majority of them were on an F/A-18, with nearly a third completed at night. In celebration of the squadron's 55th anniversary, past and current *Seahawks* shared their experiences with AR. One qualified with only 120 hours in the *Hawkeye*, while another had over 1,000. Together, their varying experiences paint a picture of the enhanced capabilities of the E-2D, how this upgrade has affected the community and its impact in the tactical mission environment.

MC2 Bonnie Lindsav, USN



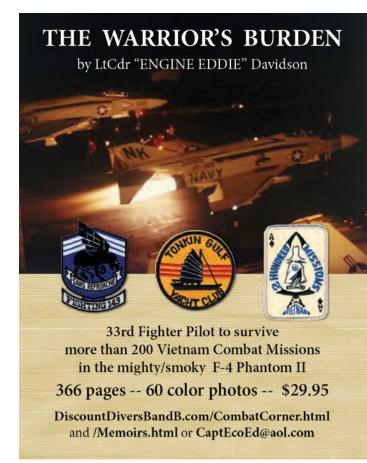
Deputy Commander U.S. Fleet Forces Command VADM Jim Kilby addresses aircrew in the VAW-126 ready room on board NavSta Norfolk, 18 May '23.

The Pilots

LT Patrick "SoiBoi" Hayes, former Seahawk and current instructor in VAW-120, the *Hawkeye* Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS), was the first junior officer to become qualified in every refueling platform during his sea tour with VAW-126, as well as the first 3P in the community to tank. Assigned to the Seahawks during 2020-'23, SoiBoi currently has over 1,000 hours in the *Hawkeye* and 295 plugs broken down as follows: 135 from the F/A-18, 106 drogue and 54 KC-135 BDA. He qualified less than 10 days after VAW-126 became AR capable and just one month into his time with the Seahawks, with only 120 hours at the time. His first plugs were on the Omega 707, which is still the case for many replacement pilots going through the FRS. Then he went on to the KC-135 and finally the F/A-18. Since the Hawkeye was retroactively designed to aerial refuel, it faces some unique challenges, such as a limited tanking envelope and difficult night joins. Aircrew on nearly every platform, including the tankers themselves, use night vision goggles or have headup displays to aid them when refueling at night, but the E-2D does not. Additionally, SoiBoi says tanking can be made more difficult due to "our limited cockpit visibility."

LCDR Michael "CrÉyes" Alexander, maintenance officer of VAW-126, is an experienced AR pilot and instructor with over 2,000 hours. He has been conducting AR since its introduction to the community, estimating over 200 plugs. When CrEyes became AR qualified, he was already an experienced fleet aviator with 1,100 hours in the *Hawkeye*. As was the case for SoiBoi, CrEyes' initial qualification was on the Omega 707, followed by the KC-10, KC-135, F/A-18 and lastly the KC-130. "[KC-]135 is by far the most challenging, and has the smallest margin for error," he says. "Smooth air, a functioning autopilot ... and a good boom operator make all the difference!"

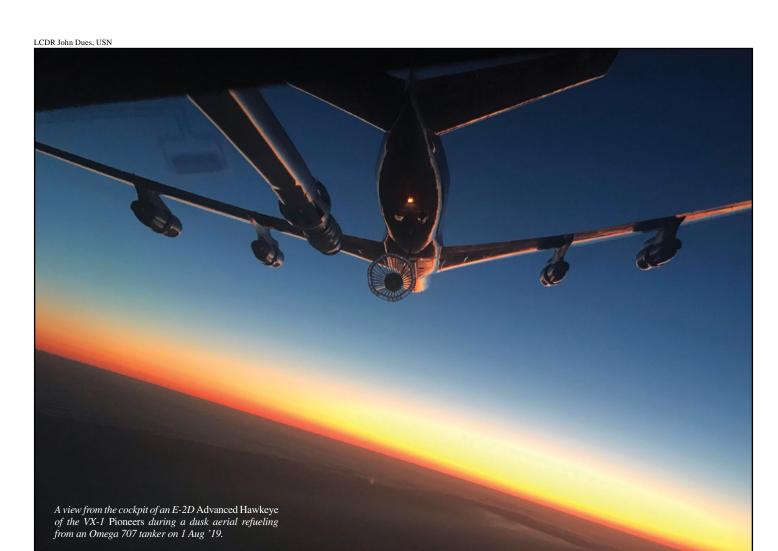
A VAW-126 Advanced Hawkeye refuels from a Pennsylvania Air National Guard KC-135 Stratotanker on 4 Feb '21. Tanking on this platform is the most challenging for E-2D aircrew.



Sen Airman Zoe M. Wockenfuss, ANG



Page 40 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 41



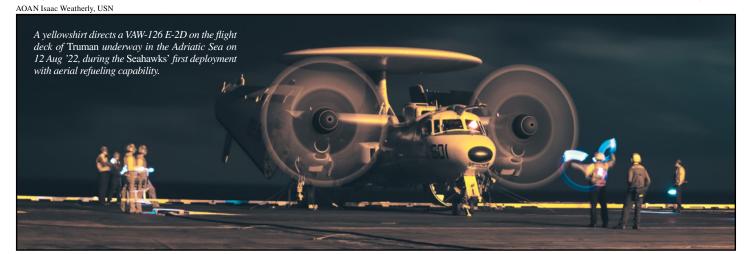
The Platforms

SoiBoi agrees with this sentiment regarding the KC-135. "Getting the plug is not the challenge on [the] 135. It's everything after that. The real work on that tanker starts once you are in the basket. The tolerances that you have to maintain the aircraft in to be in a safe refueling zone are extremely tight." He goes on to explain that tanking off the KC-135 has led to four controlled break point activations in the *Hawkeye* community, three of which were during uncontrolled disconnects or "unintentionally or in an uncontrolled manner falling out of the refueling zone." Control is key when refueling off the challenging boom-to-drogue adaptor of the KC-135, due in part to how closely the pilot must maneuver the aircraft and drogue coupling to the rigid boom in order to position the hose in just the right way to allow the flow of fuel.

CrEyes recalls the experience tanking on a KC-135 with an inoperable autopilot that led to the fleet-wide decision to prohibit this evolution, illustrating the challenges the platform presents. Attempting to plug on a KC-135 on the *Seahawks'* last deployment, CrEyes explains, "The workload required to get in the basket was so far beyond anything I had seen before, and the only other option was a divert. I was flying in the right seat, with our skipper at the time in the left seat. We made it happen, but it wasn't pretty."

Mission Impacts

All that aside, both CrEyes and SoiBoi believe the benefits outweigh the costs. Previously, SoiBoi explains, the *Hawkeye*, which is an aging airframe, had to wait on station to be relieved until a mechanically sound



and capable, or "up" airplane, could get there, or until it ran low on fuel and had to return to the ship. The latter potentially caused a gap in radar coverage. Now, with AR, if there is just one up *Hawkeye* in an air wing, it can stay aloft to provide the strike group with its valuable airborne command and control uninterrupted. CrEyes agrees, saying, "The capability that AR brought the strike group one hundred percent played a role in [our] last deployment." Without aerial refueling and extended time on station, "we would not have been able to provide the support that we provided to EUCOM [U.S. European Command]." As an example, aircrews could fly eight or more hours on station far from the carrier even with no safe or suitable field diverts.

"Additionally, modern threats and increased weapon kinematics are making long-range strikes a critical mission set," CrEyes explains. "[Aerial refueling] allows the E-2 the legs and on-station time needed to support that. We were able to prove this concept on the last deployment with a long-range maritime strike [exercise]." AR capability obviously plays a huge role tactically, but it also changes the way *Hawkeye* pilots fly around the ship. "[Refueling] allowed us to routinely show up max trap on the ball after receiving mission give," CrEyes recalls. "I rarely ever approached bingo fuel states on our last deployment, which was a huge contrast to deployments as a [junior officer] where it was relatively routine to show up close to bingo on the ball or see fuel states as low as a two point zero during blue water [operations]."

Looking Ahead

The tactics and carrier environment have changed, but the *Hawkeye* has plenty of room to grow in terms of making the extended station time more comfortable, and ultimately safer for pilots and Naval Flight Officers. "I would love some changes to the aircraft," CrEyes says. "First on my list would be an Improved Landing Mode (ILM). Flying an eight-hour mission and coming back for a night trap in poor weather is not fun." CrEyes also brings up a valid point, which is that "longer flights result in fewer traps, decreasing currency/proficiency around the boat. If we truly want to utilize [AR] to its full capability, we need ILM." Next on his list would be more comfortable seats, a quieter cockpit and a head.

As the *Seahawks* prepare for our upcoming deployment, we drill AR just as hard as field carrier landing practice. Simulators and practice tanking events on KC-135s and F/A-18s occupy as much space on the ops board as bounce periods, illustrating the importance the community places on honing the technique and precision required to operate the E-2D to its fullest extent and perform its crucial role in the strike group. As the battlespace expands, so does the *Hawkeye* community, and VAW-126 has been and will always be at the forefront of these advances. The *Seahawks* celebrate our 55 years with professionalism, proudly serving the U.S. Navy and the nation wherever *Harry S. Truman* takes us.

MC3 Logan Nystrand, USN



Page 42 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 43



IN MARSHAL

Command Changes



TF-70/CSG-5 RDML Greg Newkirk relieved RDML Pat Hannifin 12 April 2024 U.S. Fleet Activities Yokosuka



VAQ-142 CDR Alexander Horn relieved CDR Andrew Thom 23 June 2023 USS Gerald R. Ford



VUQ-10 CDR Emily Mooren relieved CAPT Andrew Gastrell 22 February 2024 NAS Patuxent River



SCHOOL CDR Mark Muncy relieved CDR Ryan Mann 21 March 2024 NavSta Norfolk

ELECTRONIC ATTACK

WEAPONS SCHOOL

CDR Christopher Anderson

relieved

CDR Matthew Keefe

14 March 2024

NAS Whidbey Island

HSC-6

CDR Robert Dalton

relieved

CDR Thomas Butts

28 March 2024

NAS North Island



VAW-117 CDR Paul Reves relieved CDR Dan Berry 8 March 2024 NBVC Point Mugu



VAW-123 CDR Alex Glass relieved CDR Melanie Ahle 29 February 2024



USS Dwight D. Eisenhower VAW-126



CDR Kallie Rose relieved CDR Thomas J. Browning 20 March 2024 NavSta Norfolk



VAQ-131 CDR James Jordan relieved CDR Luke Brown 11 April 2024 NAS Whidbey Island

VAQ-139 CDR Antonia Miggins

relieved

CDR Kevin Jones 29 February 2024

NAS Whidbey Island



VFA-137 CDR Hall Graham relieved CDR Adam Bryan 16 May 2024 NAS Lemoore



VFA-211 CDR Sean Stuart relieved CDR Marshall Foard 1 March 2024



USS Theodore Roosevelt



ABE2 Cameron Stroup at work on board USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) on 11 Dec '23.



NEW F-5 AT (ADVANCED TIGER):

- > Internal Long Wave IRST
- > Internal Multi-Channel 12-Bit DRFM Jammer
- Long-Range Passive JAM/SH00T
- > All Glass Touchscreen G3000 Flight deck
- > Scorpion Helmet Mounted Cueing System
- > Link 16
- > Purpose-Built Adversary Radar and RWR
- > Open-Architecture Design

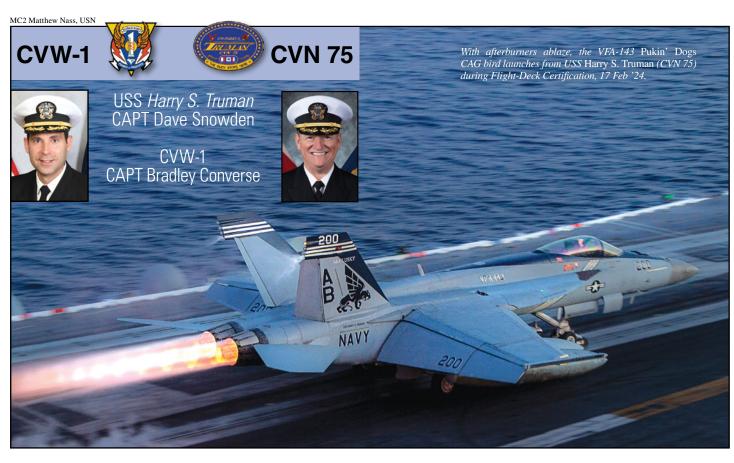
ADVERSARY FOR:

- > NAWDC
- > Airwing Fallon
- > USN/USMC F-35 & F/A-18 FRS
- > USAF F-35 & F-15 Aggressor Support





Page 44 The Hook, Summer 2024



THE DOG DAYS OF WORK UPS

by LT K. Paige "Piglet" Westoby, USN

ince our last update, the *World-Famous Pukin' Dogs* have been in the heat of work ups for our upcoming deployment. To create a cohesive combat team, we have been working closely with other CVW-1 squadrons and USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75) to ensure that we are operationally ready to deploy. In the spring we completed the air-to-air Strike Fighter Advanced Readiness Program (SFARP), which ended the "crawl" portion of work ups. Since entering the "walk" phase, CVW-1 has begun integrating with CVN 75 through Flight-Deck Certification (FDC) and Tailored Ship's Training Availability (TSTA), both of which develop foundational integration between the air wing and ship.

In addition to integrating with our counterparts, the VFA-143 wardroom recently welcomed LT Cassy "Poop" Zachares as our newest pilot and LTJG Brandon Sexton as material control officer. Some of the *Dog JOPA* have completed significant milestones in the strike fighter weapons and tactics (SFWT) syllabus. LT Zach "Checkers" Mullins completed the Level III Combat Section Lead syllabus and rapidly began Level IV events. LCDR Max "One Wire" Maguire, LTs Rich "Sticky" Rader, Paige "Piglet" Westoby and Miranda "Spunkey" Kosmides all completed the Level IV Combat Division Lead syllabus, which made VFA-143 the most tactically proficient squadron in CVW-1 with a total of 12 Combat Division Leads in the ready room. Representing the *Dogs* with thorough professionalism and determination, one of our recently detached JOs, LT Ian "KIMJI" Arbuckle, graduated with TOPGUN Class 02-24 in April with follow-on orders as the VFA-106 *Gladiators* training officer.

In the midst of work ups, the *Pukin' Dogs'* maintenance professionals have set the standard on the NAS Oceana flight line during Conventional Weapons Technical Proficiency Inspections (CWTPI) and Maintenance Program Assist (MPA). VFA-143 earned a 64, which was one of the highest scores on the flight line for the MPA. The *Dogs* still maintain the mindset that there is always room to improve, which is the mentality that has led to VFA-143 receiving the CVW-1 Golden Wrench Award for the first and second quarters.

The *Pukin' Dogs* look forward to applying our talent, obedience and persistence to be precise in all we do. We strive to continue to embody tactical expertise and professionalism, setting the bar in strike fighter aviation excellence both in the air and on the ground.

SUNLINERS SET THE STANDARD

by CWO3 Zoe Squeo, USN

During the second quarter of FY '24, the *Sunliners* have holistically proven our ability to execute in a consistent and repeatable manner by emphasizing safety and operational balance as our core mantra. Through a commitment to excellence and technical ability, the *Liner* maintenance team achieved a 95.2 percent sortic completion rate. This met all CVW-1 and Strike Fighter Wing Atlantic tasking, while maintaining a tactical hard deck, training and developing newly assigned personnel. Exhibiting the *Liner* standard, this team proved without a doubt that we are ready "ANYTIME, ANYPLACE!"

The squadron executed two major predeployment milestones while safely performing 5,286 maintenance actions encompassing 6,749 man-hours. While executing the first ever air-to-air SFARP at NAS



Flight-deck personnel surround a VFA-81 Sunliners F/A-18E on the bow of Truman as the carrier prepares to commence flight operations while underway in the Atlantic Ocean on 15 Apr '24.

Oceana, VFA-81's ability to adapt and tireless efforts resulted in the safe execution of 209.6 flight hours and the expenditure of 1,259.7 pounds of ordnance. Additionally, the squadron successfully conducted all requirements during FDC on board *Truman* with an astonishing 98 percent sortic completion rate. During CWTPI, the *Liners* showed our unmatched ability to check and load aircraft by scoring an impressive 475 out 500 points, receiving a Bravo Zulu from the inspection team.

The *Sunliners* remain adaptable and flexible amid a changing operational environment, with compounding challenges presented by aircraft availability and manning shortages. VFA-81 continues to hone maintenance processes to remain mission-orientated and safety-focused.

Over the course of the last three months, the *Sunliners* bid farewell to LCDRs Brad "Bacon" Tribley, Mark "Tlev" Dodson and LT Nicole "Dee" Williams.

A number of personnel achieved tactical milestones. The *Sunliners* are excited to congratulate LTs Kevin "CaCA" Byerly on earning SWFT Level III qualification, Gary "Air Dud" Prieto on earning SWFT Level IV and Katie "Pukasso" Arbuckle on earning SWFT Level IV+ qualification. The squadron has been working hard at its continued tactical education, none of which would be possible without the diligent efforts of our maintenance department, whose members work tirelessly to keep jets in the air.

SEAHAWKS SHINE IN ANNIVERSARY YEAR

by LT Carly Courtney, USN

The VAW-126 *Seahawks* continued preparations for our upcoming deployment by successfully completing the *Hawkeye* Advanced Readiness

Program and SFARP last fall. The former took place over multiple months, teaching our aircrew how to operate in a variety of environments across many different scenarios. CVW-1 conducted SFARP locally out of NAS Oceana and NavSta Norfolk, which gave us the opportunity to execute advanced air-to-air tactics with other air wing squadrons. These complex and challenging events allowed our controllers to perfect their skills in the dynamic arena of today's air-to-air fight.

On 20 March, the squadron held a change-of-command ceremony, bidding farewell to CDR Thomas J. Browning and welcoming new Commanding Officer CDR Kallie Rose and new Executive Officer CDR Benjamin Sanders. Shortly thereafter, on 1 April, the *Seahawks* marked our 55th anniversary as a squadron, a day celebrated with a historical remembrance and traditional cake. This anniversary coincided with the chief petty officer birthday, and all attended the joint ceremony held in the hangar.

On 10 April, the squadron embarked *Harry S. Truman* for TSTA, marking the longest underway since the 2022 deployment. This critical phase in the work-up cycle provided the *Seahawks* the opportunity to coordinate with the air wing and *Carrier Strike Group Eight* to execute tactics and train for the upcoming deployment. Soon, VAW-126 will depart for Air Wing Fallon with the rest of CVW-1. This training will allow the *Seahawks* to collaborate with the Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center and participate in large-force exercises and complex battle problems to create tactically proficient aircrews.

We are excited for what the rest of the year will bring as we continue through the Optimized-Fleet Response Program cycle and onto deployment.





Page 46 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 47





USS Carl Vinson CAPT Matthew Thomas

CVW-2 **CAPT Timothy Myers**



GOLDEN DRAGONS RETURN FROM WESTPAC

by LT Kurt Wenske, USN

In the second quarter of 2024, the *Golden Dragons* excitedly returned home from a successful Western Pacific (WESTPAC) deployment L during which we honorably promoted security cooperation, encouraged peaceful development, responded to contingencies and deterred aggression throughout the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility (AOR). After an outstanding homecoming celebration, squadronmembers quickly dispersed on post overseas movement leave to enjoy well-earned rest and relaxation.

Bearing the flame, the *Dragons* regrouped with gusto and exuberance, diving straight into the tactical execution of unit-level training. During this vital time, candidates completed 87 strike fighter weapons and tactics (SFWT) events. Paramount to this success were two Level III candidates, LTs Kris "TAPLAP" Gundersen and Fraser "Spuddle" Nadin, who completed evaluation check rides to qualify as Combat Section Leads. LT Morgan "DODO" Quinley completed the Level II SFWT syllabus and began the exciting challenge of becoming a Section Lead. Their excellence, hard work and dedication to their craft in earning their new qualifications make them indispensable to the *Dragon* team.

No unit-level training would have been possible without our maintenance team's dedication to excellence. The squadron conducted 539 sorties encompassing 805.9 flight hours with a phenomenal 95 percent sortie completion rate. *Dragon* maintainers also completed one aircraft acceptance, five pre-carrier inspections and three engine swaps, while sending two aircraft to Planned Maintenance Interval inspections.

Though the downtime never feels quite long enough, the Golden Dragons are invigorated and ready as CVW-2 remains the Navy's oncall air wing. We began with an abbreviated Air Wing Fallon (AWF) and will roll into the biannual Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, joining Team Broadsword in operations alongside 26 allies and partner nations, ensuring cohesion and lethal power projection across the Joint and allied force.

VFA-97 WARHAWKS

by LT Suzelle "Chucky" Thomas, USN

Spring 2024 for the VFA-97 Warhawks included a welcome deployment homecoming and a quick gear-up for continued training. At the end of February, the squadron returned to NAS Lemoore from a cruise on board USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), during which we toured WESTPAC for nearly five months. VFA-97 successfully deployed with 14 F-35C Lightning II aircraft, making it the largest strike fighter squadron to deploy in the Navy's recent history, and accomplished a 98 percent sortie completion rate over the course of a strenuous cruise.

After returning home the Warhawks continued to train even during the post-deployment leave period. VFA-97 qualified its three newest Combat Division Leads, LTs Grant "Hippie" Salk, Brian "Myrtle" Cullinan and Hunter "QuPID" Koltes. Such demanding qualification cycles are a testament to the dedicated Warhawks maintenance team, which continues to exceed expectations and demonstrate the highest safety standards, including earning the 2023 CNO Aviation Safety Award for the second year in a row.

MC2 Larissa T. Dougherty, USN



The nose of one VFA-97 Warhawks F-35C Lightning II frames another squadron jet on final approach for recovery on board Vinson during operations in the South China Sea on 22 Jan '24.

Following the leave period, the pilots of VFA-97 traveled to NAS Patuxent River for the annual Joint Simulation Environment (JSE) detachment. At JSE we were able to simulate eight-ship F-35C events to hone the newest tactics against ever-advancing threats. Each pilot executed four to five simulators a day in order to sharpen skills in preparation for our next deployment just a few months away.

In April, the Warhawks traveled to NAS Fallon alongside our CVW-2 counterparts to conduct an AWF refresh as a continued part of work ups. In AWF, the combined maintenance and pilot crews came together to facilitate the highest level of training, allowing VFA-97 to continue serving as CVW-2's premier fifth-generation strike fighter in various large-force exercises. As VFA-97 completes AWF, we gear up for the two-month RIMPAC, the world's largest international maritime warfare exercise. Together with our nation's allied partners, the Warhawks will complete RIMPAC ready to answer the call to fight and win prompt or sustained combat from the sea.

VAW-113 BLACK EAGLES

by LT Nicholas Workman. USN

In October 2023, Carrier Strike Group One (CSG-1) deployed to the U.S. Seventh Fleet AOR on board Carl Vinson. The VAW-113 Black Eagles, along with other CVW-2 squadrons, endeavored to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific through multiple training exercises, port visits and unit-level training missions. Deployment kicked off with Multi-Large Deck Exercise (MLDE), where units from CSG-1 conducted operations with Carrier Strike Group Five and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force helicopter destroyer JS Hyuga (DDH 181). Following MLDE, CSG-1 shifted focus to Annual Exercise and Operation Coral Dagger during the month of November. Black Eagle JOs led CVW-2 coordination

efforts with Naval Special Warfare teams for a successful exercise. With two major international exercises under its belt, CSG-1 completed a successful port visit to Busan, South Korea.

After an underway Thanksgiving dinner on board Vinson, VAW-113 collaborated with the HSC-4 Black Knights as well as Joint and combined partners to coordinate around-the-clock support for search-and-rescue (SAR) efforts in the Philippine Sea. Upon conclusion of the SAR evolutions, CSG-1 conducted various planned tactical events, a port visit to Singapore and an underway Christmas celebration to close out 2023.

To lead off the New Year, CSG-1 enjoyed a final Seventh Fleet AOR port visit in Manila, Philippines. Afterward, CSG-1 focused on the final weeks of operations. Notably, VAW-113 officers led three iterations of a Joint exercise, integrating U.S. Air Force assets with the carrier strike group. Following the joint exercise, CSG-1 conducted multiple drills with Carrier Strike Group Nine, USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) and JS Ise (DDH 182). CSG-1 had then completed all Seventh Fleet tasking and began sailing east to return to home port. As a final bookend, CSG-1 sailed to Hawaii for a port visit, welcoming family and friends for the end-of-deployment Tiger Cruise.

Throughout the deployment, VAW-113 played a pivotal role by coordinating and controlling CVW-2 assets, providing a consistent air and surface picture to combined warfare commanders. Additionally, the Black Eagles boasted an outstanding 98 percent sortie completion rate, a testament to their teamwork and sustained superior effort in demanding conditions.

We are pleased to congratulate a former JO, LT Charlie "Cabbie" Bill, as the winner of the 2023 Association of Naval Aviation George H.W. Bush Award, recognizing an outstanding firsttour carrier aviator.





Page 48 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 49

VAW-113 is maintaining deployment readiness through a detachment to NAS Fallon, community engagement participating in Los Angeles Fleet Week and honing our tactical skills as part of RIMPAC. The *Black* Eagles stand ready to dominate the battlespace, answering the call on time and on target!

BLACK KNIGHTS STAY READY

by LCDR Ryan "Rooster" McGuckin, USN

The legendary HSC-4 Black Knights returned home from a successful WESTPAC deployment as a part of CVW-2 on board Carl Vinson in late February. We have spent the spring at home growing into new hangar spaces at NAS North Island, completing inspections and continuing to advance readiness for another busy year.

The Black Knights team prepared for and completed the Helicopter Advanced Readiness Program, Maintenance Program Assessment and Command Assist Visit that occurred nearly simultaneously in mid-April. Despite the high operational tempo, the squadron has maintained and increased proficiency, specifically in SAR jump and hoist training. During the post-deployment period, HSC-4 safely and successfully requalified 17 aircrewmen for SAR jumps, conducted initial live hoist training for eight aircrewmen and requalified 19 aircrewmen in their 180-day live hoist currency. The squadron places great emphasis on live hoist training, ensuring that the team is proficient at various altitudes and conditions so they are best prepared to conduct rescues should the need arise.

In the spirit of innovation, HSC-4 has also been working to develop proficiency with "Knightlink" video relay capability. The Black Knights have dedicated time working with technical representatives and maritime and ground-based assets to improve functionality for future use.

HSC-4 earned the 2023 CNO Aviation Safety Award, receiving its third Safety "S" in the last four years. The Black Knights team takes great pride in safety and knows it is a culture of excellence and buy-in from every member of the squadron that allows us to win this award year after year. We stand ready to maintain proficiency, readiness and a culture of excellence as we reflect on the last deployment and look ahead to another legendary year.

AWS1 Peter Prosser, USN



For the HSC-4 Black Knights, a return from deployment means preparing for the next one, to include search-and-rescue jump and hoist training for rescue swimmers employing the squadron's MH-60S Seahawks.



Aircrew and the dedicated Sailors that carry out operations on the flight deck of USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) pictured in front of a VFA-83 Rampagers F/A-18E during combat operations in the Red Sea, 12 Mar '24. LT JAGAN RAVICHANDRAN



USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* **CAPT Chris Hill**

CVW-3 **CAPT Marvin Scott**

UNPRECEDENTED

he 7 October 2023, terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel transformed the deployment of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower Strike Group, Leading to the most dynamic combat actions in defense of a carrier strike group since World War II. When Battle Axe and Carrier Strike Group Two (CSG-2) returned from their Composite Training Unit Exercise last July, the plan for deployment was simple — a port call in Split, Croatia, a brief stint in Fifth Fleet and then back to Sixth Fleet to continue our European tour. World events demanded a different path as the Secretary of Defense directed CSG-2 to make best speed to the Suez Canal and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR). We completed carrier qualification and pushed east.

After entering the AOR on 4 November, Battle Axe flew Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) missions from the Red Sea (unprecedented!). planned and rehearsed contingency operations in the Gulf of Aden (GOA), and sharpened the knife in the Gulf of Oman and North Arabian Sea. After a quick 36-hour stop for beer-on-the-pier and fried chicken (if you've been there, you know), the Eisenhower Strike Group transited the Strait of Hormuz on 26 November, and CVW-3 began supporting OIR from the Persian Gulf. After several Houthi attacks against civilian shipping in and around the Bab-el-Mandeb (BAM) Strait, we canceled Christmas and headed back to the GOA to defend the freedom of navigation the Houthis had begun to hold at risk.

While conducting counterpiracy and presence operations in the GOA, Battle Axe began supporting our surface combatants in the Southern Red Sea with defensive counter air (DCA)/Surface Combat Air Patrol missions. On 26 December, the VFA-105 Gunslingers drew blood during the Navy's first unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) air-to-air engagement (unprecedented!) while defending civilian merchant shipping and U.S. Navy destroyers. One-way attack (OWA) UAV targeting was no longer an exclusive Standard Missile 2/6 mission, and "Splash One" was called by dozens of Gypsy, Ram, Wildcat, Gunslinger and Zapper (yes, unprecedented!) pilots over the next four months.

After weeks of defending against OWA UAVs and anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM), the strike group entered the next phase of the conflict in the early morning of 31 December 2023. While Ambush (HSM-74 Swamp Foxes) and Dusty (HSC-7 Dusty Dogs) protected Ike during her BAM Strait transit, four Houthi small boats attacked the nearby container ship Maersk Hangzhou. Responding to the distressed vessel, two MH-60Rs from HSM-74 were deliberately fired upon in a blatant escalation of the conflict by the Houthis. Battle Axe doesn't start fights, we finish them; and Ambush returned fire in self-defense sinking the boats (unprecedented!).

While Houthi rhetoric escalated following the New Year's Eve selfdefense engagement, CSG-2 established a defensive posture in the Red Sea within the Houthi's ASBM, anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM) and OWA UAV weapons engagement zone to protect shipping and deter attack. Despite continued deterrence efforts, on 9 January the Houthis brazenly launched a large multiwave and multidomain attack against the strike group (unprecedented!) in what is now called "The Battle of the BAM."

That night, immediately following scheduled flight operations, the air and missile defense commander called away Battle Axe alerts due to indications and warnings of an



AE3 Lauren Duval, USN

Page 50 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 51

impending Houthi attack. Eight Battle Axe DCA fighters (with tankers as well as VAW-123 Screwtops command and control (C2)), three escorts (USS Gravely (DDG 107), USS Laboon (DDG 58) and USS Mason (DDG 87)), and the British Royal Navy's HMS Diamond (D34) intercepted and destroyed over 20 UAVs, ASCMs and ASBMs, preventing any damage to Coalition forces. In response, three days later the Coalition seized the initiative with an organic large- force strike into Houthi-controlled Yemen (unprecedented!), successfully destroying dozens of military targets and immediately transitioning to persistent Dynamic Targeting (DT), destroying many more.

Following that first of five deliberate large-force strikes, the Houthis continued their campaign to target civilian merchants, Coalition vessels and the Eisenhower Strike Group. But again, Battle Axe would get the last word with dozens of air-to-air engagements following middle-of-thenight alert launches during "The Rumble in the Red Sea" on 3 February, "The Hudaydah Hat Trick" on 19 February, "The Battle Tanker Strikes Back" on 22 February (unprecedented!), "The Growler Takes a Commit" on 5 March (unprecedented!) and "March Madness" on 19 March. This last date is notable as nearly three dozen OWA UAVs launched in a multiaxis coordinated ambush on the strike group. With effective integration across CSG-2, Battle Axe successfully defended against the persistent and scrappy Houthi threat every time.

Even while launching regular late-night and early morning alerts, the air wing's strike fighter squadrons and VAQ-130, with VAW-123 airborne C2, conducted almost daily DT strikes through the first three months of 2024. First targeting surveillance radars and early warning capabilities, aircrew then continued to systematically destroy Houthi threats to international shipping: UAVs, unmanned surface vehicles (USV), underwater unmanned vehicles (UUV) (unprecedented!), along with ASCMs and ASBMs prior to launch. To date, the air wing has precisely and violently employed several dozen AIM-9X Sidewinders and AIM-120 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) as well as multiple AGM-88E Advanced Anti-radiation Guided Missiles (AARGM) (unprecedented!), AGM-154C Joint Standoff Weapons (JSOW) (unprecedented!), and AGM-114 Hellfire (unprecedented!) air-tosurface missiles while dropping several hundred precision-guided bombs.

When *Ike* departed NavSta Norfolk on 14 October, no one predicted spending the majority of our deployment in the Red Sea, averaging 4,000 flight hours per month, loading four AIM-9Xs on an F/A-18, the first EA-18G Growler air-to-air combat employment, the first air-toair engagement from a "Battle Tanker," medical evacuations to neverbefore-used airfields, the first JSOW-C combat employment, or the first 4xAIM-9X and 5xAIM-120 "Murder Hornet" configuration. Yet, our proverbial bingo card continues to grow, and as of this writing *Battle* Axe is pressing the deck on liberty for the first port call of deployment, an unprecedented reinvigoration of a time-honored Navy tradition!

We look forward to celebrating with everyone at Tailhook, but if we aren't there, rest assured the Swordsmen of VFA-32, Rampagers of VFA-83, Wildcats of VFA-131, Gunslingers of VFA-105, Zappers of VAQ-130, Screwtops of VAW-123, Swamp Foxes of HSM-74 and Dusty Dogs of HSC-7, with tremendous combat logistics support from the Mambas of VRC-40 Det 4, are ready to execute unprecedented combat actions at any time and in any place. So have a drink for us! Train hard and be ready!

SWORDS OUT

by LT Carlee "MIDGE" Conway, USN

Your Fighting Swordsmen of VFA-32 are checking in from Ready Room 6 on board USS Dwight D. Eisenhower — battle tested, tactically proficient and desperately ready for some more time in port. This deployment has been anything but predictable, some may even say unprecedented, but regardless of what each day has brought, the Gypsies have been there to answer the call.

VFA-32, alongside *Team Battle Axe* and CSG-2, has been stationed in the Red Sea off the coast of Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen since before the start of the New Year. We are actively participating in Operation Prosperity Guardian to ensure freedom of the seas, free flow of commerce throughout the world and defense of U.S. and Coalition assets in the area. To date, the *Gypsies* have successfully employed over 121,000 pounds of combat ordnance, to include 106 Joint Direct Attack Munitions, 18 AIM-9X Sidewinders, three AIM-120 AMRAAMs and three AGM-154 JSOWs, all with 100 percent validity. This is a testament

MC3 Nicholas Rodriguez, USN

A high-speed pass over the deck of Ike marks the airborne Change of Command for the VFA-32 Fighting Swordsmen on 16 Apr '24.

to the outstanding training and leadership found in the VFA-32 ready room. No matter what comes our way, we are ready and willing.

Despite persistent combat operations in the CENTCOM AOR, the Gypsies were able to qualify eight Level II and one Level III strike fighter weapons and tactics (SFWT) aircrew. Congratulations to LCDRs Gavin "Scrat" Falcona, Zac "Midrat" Zatorski, LTs Trent "Sonic" Compton, Nick "Slider" Rudnik, Brittany "SPAM" Kramer, Brandon "BLU?" Bristow, Dave "Dexter" Carris and LTJG Stu "SLAP" Bayliss on their SFWT Level II qualifications, and to LT Thomas "Squanchy" Gregory on achieving Level III.

Amid all of our combat victories and SFWT qualifications, we have said a few goodbyes to some world-famous Gypsies. Those who have departed the pattern include LCDRs Matthew "Dudeboat" Manship, Xavier "Diamond Dave" Kelley, LTs Brian "Wal-E" Wistner and Barry "Babadook" Draper. Dudeboat moved on to Washington D.C. for a tour at the Joint Staff, and Diamond Dave is getting his dream shot of becoming a department head in the VFA-103 Jolly Rogers. Meanwhile, Wal-E took his big brain to the United States Naval Test Pilot School and Babadook is attending Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) before taking his talents to Strike Fighter Weapons School Atlantic as a prospective strike fighter tactics instructor. Their unyielding dedication, tactical savagery and lighthearted ready room presence has surely been missed, and their new commands are lucky to have such upstanding aviators.

Finally, the *Gypsies* held an airborne Change of Command on 16 April as CDR Jason "IAD...S" Hoch relieved CDR Michael "SIP" Miller as commanding officer of the VFA-32 Swordsmen. We are extremely grateful for CDR Miller's empowering leadership and mentorship throughout his tenure as skipper, especially during this combat deployment. Coming to join the squadron as our new executive officer is CDR Kyle "Sweet P" Terwilliger, and we are excited to welcome him to the ready room.

Overall, the *Gypsies* have had a deployment we surely will not forget. While Virginia Beach is hopefully on the horizon, the *Fighting Swordsmen* are grateful for the experiences we have had to date and continue to stand ready to answer all calls that come our way. Gypsy Roll!

RED SEA SHENANIGANS

by LT Jagan "(BUCKY)" Ravichandran, USN

Do you know the best part about spending your fourth month straight in the Red Sea? You get older, but the Houthis still Houthi. But that's all right because the Rampagers are still here, holding it down through all the unprecedented events that have unfolded since the last time I wrote a column for *The Hook*. As a side quest (an ironic one because we can't participate), please partake of a drink of your choice every time you read the word "unprecedented."

There is something you should know about shenanigans: If you shenanigan once, you will shenanigan. The Houthis have yet to prove this wrong, and they have kept us unprecedentedly busy here for the last four months. During that time, we developed creative solutions to fight effectively. The first unprecedented change was an increase to the mighty Rhino's authorized loadout, and thanks to our own skipper. What's better than 2 AIM-9X? If you answered more, you are correct. Coining this 1/0/4/G configuration as the "Heater Wagon™," we started slinging heaters left and right against drones. We also started slinging other fancy air-to-surface munitions; in fact, so many of them that we got an unprecedented increase in our max trap, now authorized at 48K! With tensions rising, we received tasking to support OIR with as many missiles as possible; enter the 5/0/4/G (and FLIR ... ugh) configuration we call the "Murder *Hornet*™." Every unprecedented problem offered by the threat here was creatively tackled by arguably the best leaders, tacticians and warfighters in the U.S. Navy.

February and March brought us serious engagements for which we aptly came up with cool names like the "Battle of the BAM," "Red Sea Rumble," "Hudaydah Hat Trick" and "March Madness." There were so many targets that even tankers started getting kills. A couple of the senior Ram pilots even started contracting themselves out to tanker squadrons to get extra swings at the bat! As Training Officer "Dirty Mike" would say before every alert launch and large-force strike, "Tonight, it's about buckets." He kept saying this as he put on his game day jersey and strapped on gear for flights he wasn't even scheduled to make. We also turned 74 in April, marking nearly three quarters of a century of aviation greatness. What better way to celebrate the squadron's legacy than to execute flawless combat operations as our Sailors and pilots work

Time spent in the Red Sea is like getting lost in the desert. You keep walking, some weary stranger gives you a drink (beer day) and points you to the nearest oasis (port). Then you keep walking again for what seems like forever, never find the oasis (port is canceled), run into another weary stranger who gives you a drink (second beer day) and tells you the oasis is just over the next dune. The *Rampagers* still hold onto hope as we trundle through this unprecedented time, looking for an oasis to hang our hats on and take a real drink.

The following set of "X" messages captures the ready room vibes over this unprecedented time:



A VFA-83 Rampagers Rhino catches a wire on board Eisenhower following a mission on 13 Jan '24. While this aircraft returned with its ordnance, the intensity of Houthi attacks have translated into many CVW-3 aircraft landing with empty racks.

JO "ROOKIE" started to carry a baseball bat at the end of every month to collect everyone's dues. No one wants to pay their boat mess bills when they could finance a car for the same amount of money. He also keeps buying McCafé coffee grounds, instead of LITERALLY any other coffee brand. In his words, "It's a taste of home," just not the taste most

JO "Benzo" gets his dream shot of going to the TOPGUN class in Fallon. He was so excited he shaved his mustache for a second time (we didn't like the change). We all wept as he started to clasp his sleeves down and say phrases like, "Right on man!"

JO "Britney" thinks he can get away with breaking the 22TB hard drive the mess bought before deploying only a month into deployment. I just wanted to mention this here, so he remembers to pay us back someday.

#NeverForget Hinge-select "Beavis" keeps taking the reins on being the Admin Queen for the upcoming port call. He thinks he is the right man for the job because of his experience, but we all know he just wants to leave the boat a day early. Truth be told, he is the most junior pilot with any port call experience.

Super JO "Jeeves" gets so much mail he quickly became the impromptu Coffee Mess Officer. I don't know who sends him mail, but the ready room is grateful as he donates all of it to us.

The Rams welcomed our newest pilot on deployment, Cole "Carey Cole #5 Car" Carey. It is not his official callsign, but a DH "Fat Goose" special that will most likely stick.

Lastly, we can't skip the update on the most important topic — the espresso machine. The ready room went into a frenzy as we discovered a broken extension that enables us to make double shots efficiently. We were all scared Skipper "D-Rex" would take the machine away from us lowly peasants for breaking it, only to find out he was the one who broke it. It's month seven and we still have a working caffeine machine that keeps us awake. Unprecedented.

VFA-131 WILDCATS: 40 YEARS OF DOMINANCE

by LT Ben "Clifford" Longacre, USN

On 14 October 2023, the VFA-131 Wildcats embarked Dwight D. Eisenhower for what has become an unprecedented deployment. Only days before departure, we celebrated the squadron's 40th birthday in true fighter pilot fashion — playing a golf tournament at our home base of NAS Oceana's Hornet Golf Course. VFA-131 formally established on 2 October 1983, at NAS Lemoore, and after a brief stint at NAS Cecil Field, Fla., the Wildcats moved to Oceana. Numerous Captain Michael J. Estocin and Battle "E" Awards later, the squadron continues to dominate the skies of Virginia Beach and the world as Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic's (AIRLANT) First and Finest.

When the squadron embarked Ike in mid-October, no one could have predicted the dynamic deployment that awaited us. Even prior to entering the Mediterranean Sea, CVN 69's scheduled area of operations for the next several months, the strike group received orders to make best speed for the U.S. Fifth Fleet AOR. Upon transiting the Suez Canal (affectionately known as "The Ditch"), *Ike* and CVW-3 supported OIR missions from the Red Sea. After



Light from the wands of flight-deck personnel cast a glow on a VFA-131 Wildcats F/A-18E Super Hornet as it prepares for a night launch from Eisenhower conducting operations in the Red Sea on 18 Apr '24

The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 53 Page 52

a brief stint there, the carrier transited the BAM Strait and proceeded through the GOA to the Gulf of Oman. In late November 2023, CSG-2 was once again redirected, this time through the Strait of Hormuz, to conduct missions from the Persian Gulf. Here, the *Wildcats* flew sorties over Syria and Iraq in support of OIR.

Last December, the strike group received new tasking and transited back toward the GOA to fulfill the oldest mission of our dear Navy — defense of merchant shipping routes and vessels. It would be the Iranian-backed Houthi's malign behavior that brought *Ike* back to these waters, and subsequently north through the BAM once again to operate out of the Southern Red Sea to degrade the Houthi threat against freedom of navigation.

This is where CSG-2, CVN 69 and CVW-3 made the news daily for our efforts to protect innocent shipping traffic and Coalition vessels from the Houthi's attempted disruptions to maritime shipping. It was a Wildcat pilot, launching as the alert DCA in the pitch black, who started the CVW-3 shooting gallery in the Red Sea. With his VFA-105 wingman behind him, he swooped in and employed his AIM-9X missiles, taking out multiple Houthi attack drones heading toward defenseless merchant vessels. A few days later, Wildcat pilots were again called upon by CVW-3 and CSG-2 to participate in self-defense strikes into adversary territory, destroying Houthi missiles and drone sites feet dry over northwest Yemen. Only days later, a VFA-131 section arrived on combat air patrol ready to hunt. Tasking came down to destroy cruise missile launchers positioned to strike innocent shipping traffic. In typical fashion, the Wildcat pilots quickly and lethally employed GBU-38 Joint Direct Attack Munitions on the targets, leaving a crater where the launchers once stood. Since then, the squadron has continued to prosecute targets during several preplanned strikes carried out by *Team Battle Axe*, as well as on a myriad of dynamic targeting and DCA flights.

Finally, after nearly three months at sea, the *Mighty Ike* took a knee and allowed the crew to enjoy a beer day. Even on this day of rest and relaxation, there were still *Wildcat* pilots standing the alert, ready to answer any and all aggressions by the Houthis. After a couple of months, two beer days, no ports and a couple of named operations, we have MC3 Nicholas Rodriguez, USN

Page 54

continued to perform valiantly in delivering violence of action on time and on target in support of *Operation Yukon Lightning* and OIR, and other CENTCOM tasking.

The *Wildcats* take pride in being the most lethal squadron, in the most lethal air wing, in the most lethal strike group, as part of the most lethal deployment in recent history. It has been the squadron's relentless pursuit of excellence throughout its history up to the present deployment that has engraved the *Wildcats* name and reputation in the annals of Naval Aviation history. We are, and have always been, AIRLANT's First and Finest. *Wildcats*, Ready to Hunt!

VFA-105 GUNSLINGERS

by LT Daniel "Panda" Peters, USN

The warm Red Sea winter has faded away and given rise to an even warmer spring. The VFA-105 *Gunslingers* remain on board *Eisenhower* with *Team Battle Axe* as we continue to execute flight operations in support of *Operations Prosperity Guardian* and *Yukon Lightning*. The mission remains the same as it has throughout the U.S. Navy's history, to ensure the freedom of navigation on the high seas. The past three months have consisted of DT missions and large-force strikes, around-the-clock carrier operations, classic ready room culture and a long-awaited and well-deserved port call.

In order to protect merchant vessels transiting the Gulf of Oman and Red Sea, the *Gunslingers* have executed hundreds of DT missions and employed an unprecedented amount of air-to-air and air-to-surface ordnance to combat Houthi aggression terrorizing the region. We have located, targeted and successfully destroyed threats that presented a clear and imminent danger to the merchant vessels and Coalition warships operating in the region. With a variety of weapons in the Houthi arsenal, we have destroyed a plethora of enemy hardware to include ASBM and ASCM launchers, USVs and OWA UAVs. Commonly, the *Gunslingers* awoke to the sound of the tactical action officer on the ship's 1MC directing the launch of Alert DCA fighters to defend against continued swarm attacks of OWA UAVs airborne in the region.



The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 55



Preplanned large-force strikes have continued at a steady pace as well. The *Gunslingers* have delivered both the ordnance and fuel required to achieve mission success every time. In the days leading up to each strike, ordnance of all shapes and sizes tightly packed the ship, ready to make the ascent to the flight deck and into the arms of our aviation ordnancemen for loading onto the pylons and missile rails of squadron F/A-18E *Super Hornets*. The tankers and strikers launched in a flurry of other *Battle Axe* jets to execute each mission into Houthi-controlled Yemen. While away, the flight deck resembled a ghost town that brought back memories of the ship just before a fly-on more than six months ago. Every time, the *Gunslingers* executed our mission admirably with metered violence and expert precision.

Back inside the skin of the ship, the *Gunslingers* continued the traditions of a strike fighter squadron underway. The special duty officer's popcorn has reached a spiciness that makes our maintenance desk wheeze and cough. The wardrooms shudder at the sight of well over a dozen sweaty, salty, meat-eating, French toast-tearing and scrambled-egg-wolfing *Gunslinger* officers arriving all at once for midrats. The whole ready room is now in a competition of small teams to determine the fittest athletes and best ball flyers of the squadron. Recently, we also said a difficult goodbye to two of our own. We bailed LT Evan "Squints" Goss with a sunset cigar social on the navigator's porch and bid farewell to LCDR Jeff "PWE" Mayer on a cool day with the backdrop of the Suez Canal. Most recently, the squadron welcomed LCDR Julius "Whiskers" Bratton to Ready Room 8.

Finally, in the last days of April, the *Gunslingers*, alongside the crew of *Ike* and CVW-3, finally walked off the brow and onto to the shores of Souda Bay, Greece, for the first port call of deployment. We devoured olives, seafood and cheeses of all varieties. The entire town of Chania is now devoid of bougatsa, wine and tattoo ink. After six and a half months of an arduous deployment, the Souda Bay port call brought a renewed sense of energy and focus to the ready room of VFA-105. When we go home, we do not know, but for the moment, we know exactly where we are going — back to our stomping grounds to defend innocent people from the bad guys of the world and to ensure the freedom of navigation on the high seas! Tonight ... We Ride!

ZAPPERS EXECUTE NUMEROUS FIRSTS!

by LT Martin "Debbie Longhorn" Prikasky, USN

"MAGNUM!" The year 2024 has been a roller coaster for the VAQ-130 *Zappers* with massive amounts of excitement paired equally with challenges. The Hamas attacks against Israel changed everything shortly after we deployed in October. Instead of a short stint in CENTCOM and the bulk of deployment matching previous East Coast carriers' U.S. European Command cruises, the *Eisenhower Strike Group* rushed into theater and did not have leave nor hit a true port for more than six months. Due to Iranian-backed Houthi attacks on the worldwide economy and the persistent threat to freedom of navigation, CSG-2 maintained a stronghold in the Red Sea, where the *Zappers* played an integral role in defending merchant vessels and the free flow of commerce.

As part of *Yukon Lightning*, the *Zappers* supported multiple strikes and DT sorties deep into the Houthi-controlled territory of Yemen. The strikes, conducted by Coalition forces, continue to deplete the Houthi's inventory of weapons and munitions used to carry out their attacks. The *Zappers* executed their primary mission of suppression of enemy air defenses with violent precision, creating a sanctuary from which our strike fighter brethren could operate with impunity. VAQ-130 protected Coalition aircraft by providing warning of potential threats, jamming enemy radars with the ALQ-99 tactical jamming pod and employing AARGM, achieving a milestone with the first use of the latter in combat against Houthi SAM and radar sites. The squadron maintained a steady airborne presence for months with no breaks.

The *Zappers* also made history as the first *Growler* squadron to score an air-to-air kill, successfully splashing UAVs operated by the Houthis that threaten merchant shipping and Coalition warships. When asked what it felt like to achieve the VAQ community's first kill, LT Daniel "Mantrap" Wise replied, "Fan-frickin'-tastic! JOPA 4 Life!!" This is a true testament to *Zapper* aircrews' abilities to rapidly adapt to a threat, and all of VAQ-130 Sailors' tireless efforts to keep aircraft, weapons and equipment in a constant state of combat readiness despite multiple extensions and massive amounts of uncertainty with their schedule.

The dynamic environment of the Red Sea requires CSG-2 to maintain an alert posture, ready to respond to any threat.

Despite the many challenges presented, the Zappers consistently rise o meet them with an overwhelming desire to DOMINATE THE ELECT-ROMAGNETIC SPECTRUM TO BE DECISIVELY VICTORIOUS IN COMBAT. ANYTIME. ANYWHERE ... even a dirt det in Jordan to allow Ike a port call ... Zap Zap Dominate!

VAW-123 SCREWTOPS

by LTJG Avesta Shwany, USN

As the New Year kicked off for the Screwtops, CVW-3's mission in the Red Sea took a dramatic tactical shift. On 9 January, the Houthis launched a massive attack on merchant shipping in the Red Sea. CSG-2, CVW-3 and one British destroyer were able to shoot down 18 OWA drones, two ASCMs and one ASBM that were targeting merchant shipping transiting the BAM Strait. During the attack, the *Screwtops* provided critical C2 to the airborne strike fighters, while ensuring the meeting of the warfare commander's intent.

On 11 January, in response to this large-scale attack by the Houthis, CVW-3, *Gravely* and United Kingdom forces carried out a large-scale, Joint strike to decrease the Houthi's capability to attack vessels in the Red Sea. This was successful in destroying 60 Houthi targets located at 16 sites throughout Yemen, resulting in the destruction of anti-ship missile launch sites, storage facilities and C2 centers. During this largescale strike, VAW-123 played the crucial role of providing the air picture to the attacking aircraft, C2 for the strike, time-critical authorization and communication relay to the fighters, warfare commanders and Combined Air Operation Center. This was the first time in over two decades that U.S. and U.K. forces have conducted a strike of this scale. Concurrently, the Screwtops and CVW-3 have been carrying out precise DT against strategic Houthi targets in the Red Sea.

The changes in the tactical picture have not been the only ones for the squadron during our 2023-'24 deployment. On 28 February, we conducted a change-of-command ceremony as CDR Alex Glass relieved

CDR Melanie Ahle, who had served as the commanding officer of VAW-123 for the preceeding 18 months. Her leadership was critical in steering the Screwtops to success through work ups and into the first half of deployment. Now, CDR Glass takes the reins and leads the *Screwtops* through the end of deployment and our transition to the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye in Fiscal Year 2024. We are also excited to welcome aboard CDR Michael Ptacek as executive officer.

The Screwtops remained busy into the months of March and April as we continued to defend freedom of navigation. The squadron's actions have proven to be vital as tensions continue to heighten. As recently as 6 March, Houthi missiles struck the cargo ship *True Confidence*, killing three mariners and injuring many more. These were the first civilian casualties since the Houthis began their attacks on the highly trafficked shipping route. Only a few days later, on 9 March, the Houthi's launched dozens of drones in the Red Sea area overnight, targeting U.S. Navy ships, True Confidence as it was under tow to safety and other commercial vessels transiting the region. The Screwtops' contributions to CVW-3 directly resulted in the downing of at least 20 UAVs, protecting U.S. and Coalition vessels from damage. To wrap up the month of March, the squadron participated in another large-scale Joint strike.

The Screwtops continue to provide airborne C2 for the carrier strike group to defend the free flow of commerce and shipping through the BAM Strait. To date, the squadron has completed over 250 flights for an astonishing 1,500 flight hours in support of multi-axis large-scale strikes and combat operations thanks to all of the hard work of our administrators, logisticians, culinary specialists and intelligence professionals. The World-Famous Screwtops are eager and ready to face any challenge that may come our way.

VAW-123 Screwtops aircrew pictured on the flight deck of Eisenhower, part of *CVW-3's unprecedented operations in the* U.S. Fifth Fleet *area of responsibility.*







USS Ronald Reagan CAPT Daryle Cardone

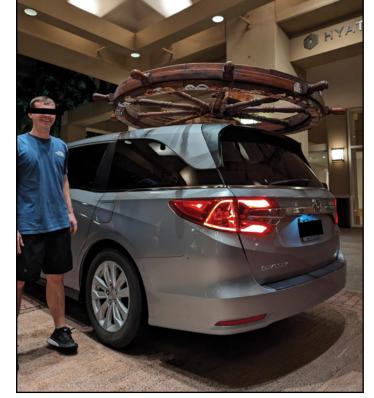
CVW-5 CAPT Patrick S. Corrigan



VFA-27 ROYAL MACES

by LT John "Bath Salt" Brooks, USN

Tumbly acknowledging the motivation and pride that accompanied the Commander, Naval Air Force Pacific Battle "E" recognition this year, the *Royal Maces* write to you with heavy hearts as we fell short in our endeavor to secure the most coveted of titles — Badman Sports Champions, of course. Despite our hard-charging, killer singleseat physiques dominating through the brackets for basketball, spouses volleyball and softball, it was simply not enough. The Maces strolled (perhaps over-) confidently into Club Iwakuni following our 22-3 mercy rule-invoking conquest over the Shadowhawks in the softball finals. Then the unthinkable occurred. The endomorphic specimens of VAQ-141, who had prevailed in hobbies such as bowling and the 5K — how is running a sport? — efficiently worked their way through the beer die brackets to the finals, where our hubris-stricken CAG Paddles were outmatched. essentially handing them the trophy ... along with their self-respect (looking at you "BCB"). Though the sting of defeat was still fresh in our hearts (we have clearly let it go after two months), the Maces enjoyed good times and fine wine at the Badman Ball and were pumped to see our very own skipper, CDR Adam "Jufro" Cohen, take home a Baddie Award with a landslide victory. There was simply no contest for the award for "Best Flow." However, when the winner of "Hingiest Hinge" was announced, we were collectively dumbfounded when we did not hear the name LCDR Ryan "Mayhem" Mahon called.



A Royal Mace in lawful possession of a piece of storied Naval Aviation lore in Tumon Bay, Guam, IYKYK! MiYF!

Page 56 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 57

In March, VFA-27 traveled to sunny Guam to conduct the Strike Fighter Advanced Readiness Program (SFARP) and from the moment we popped canopies, the sun was out, the sand was white, the water was crystal clear, and the flying was awesome. The *Maces* executed intense air-to-air multiplane events, honed our air-to-surface skills and never passed up an opportunity to re-hack our low-altitude training currency among the Mariana Islands, all of which amounted to some epic training. Although we spent most of the detachment (det) either fumbling with or sharpening our metaphorical spears airborne or in the lovely, seemingly porous, more than slightly black mold-infested training building known as the "Tropicana," VFA-27 did get some downtime. Whether it was karaoke led by LT Sam "Squatch" Schultz with his soulful renditions of "Third Eye Blind" classics, sightseeing at the sophisticated New Hana or looking over our shoulder at any establishment for Strike Fighter Weapons School Pacific guys — most notably Andrew "Movel" Casson or Kyle "Sticky Bill" Wickiser — looking to play a surprise game of "Slap Face," the *Maces* could regularly be found roaming Tumon Bay, only on non-school nights, of course.

Before shifting gears, we would be doing the esteemed perusers of this prestigious periodical a disservice if we failed to chronicle and forever memorialize the true heroes of Guam — the watchstanders. While the Level IV+ strike fighter weapons and tactics candidates were consistently pulling back-to-back 14-hour workdays, their devotion was nothing in comparison to the ground officers who selflessly stood the watch. While the pilots were lounging in a somewhat air-conditioned, partially leakfree building talking about how "valid their employments were," the humble ground officers could be found at their post, no matter the hour. Out in the Guam heat, albeit under shade and with a nice breeze, stripped of their rank in loose, tropical civilian clothes on the sandy beaches of Tumon Bay, they stood the watch. Canvassing the beach, the hotel pools. the beach bar and a mere stone's throw from their hotel rooms, these thankless heroes gave up all semblance of a work-life balance in their dedication to duty. With arguably questionable drinking water, they had no choice but to resort to the abundance of local beverages as their sole source of hydration. They would stand the duty, sometimes with no end in sight, as these grueling watches could last over 24 hours until relief arrived, if ever.

It was their commitment to the General Orders of a Sentry, namely the fifth and eleventh orders, which provided them with the sinew and grit to endure on that stool from before sunrise to long after sunset. In fact, our intelligence officer, Noah "DrainO" Gratias, went above and beyond the call of duty when he so nobly and selflessly gave up his Navy Air Logistics Office seat for his own Sailor — an act of pure altruism, demonstrating true servant leadership — and stayed behind alone in Guam. For 168 hours, DrainO faithfully fulfilled his duties, not knowing when, or if, his rescue would arrive, and forced to come to grips with a measly \$124 per diem each day. Did he falter given the enormity of his burden? Nay! With nothing but the island's signature refreshments he sat (relatively) upright, continuing to collect MARGINT and, in doing so, demonstrated immense sacrifice that was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

As a result of our super successful trip to Guam, the *Royal Maces* are extremely proud to announce the first JOs in CAG Biz, and quite possibly the entire fleet, to receive Level IV+ qualifications: LTs Jeff "PASTOR" Nadela and Dave "MIJT" Ossing! Clipping at their heels, LT Jake "PESO" Parrott is VFA-27's newest Combat Division Lead! Every other JO is absolutely loving life in Level III now that LCDR(sel) Greg "Sassy" D'Alessandro, leading the charge, finally published the first edition of Sassy's Program on the secret component of the Defense Information Systems Network.

With spring comes new life and given the times, we cannot get a fresh face without first saying goodbye to two or three salty Forward-Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) veterans. At our Tokyo Dining Out, we bid farewell to LT Shane "Scrat" Kravetz, a cornerstone of the JOPA, and founder and chairman of The Ready 8 Café. He is a great friend and pilot and will be sorely missed. In the throes of the same night, our hearts were heavy and largely confused, as we bore witness to one final debrief from our training officer, LCDR Joshua "HODOR" Gordon. The message was so mesmerizing that one outspoken observer asked repeatedly, "Is this real life ... Is this really happening?" We may never know the answer. Shortly after Guam, LT Gordon "Slowbro" Carroll, the Tanker King himself and a beloved member of the JOPA, departed. But before we even had time to mourn, he had re-entered the stack wearing green patches and uttering cringe-worthy phrases like "Chippy Ho" and



"Say BRC" [basic reconnaissance course] during Case 1 Ops. Goodbyes are never easy, and for some, it may be easier to delay the emotional pain by simply moving down the hall. Just ask former *Mace*, LCDR "Spatch" Aaker, who (allegedly) only accepted a job with the *Dambusters* so he could hang out with us at unofficial functions. You are welcome anytime! Springtime also brought two new additions to the squadron, our new training officer, LCDR Matthew "GASH" Schulteis, as well as another department head, LCDR Bobby "Juice" Ward. Both are quickly acclimating to the squadron and JOPA has entered DEFCON 1.

As we marched nearer to our 2024 cruise, the *Royal Maces* enjoyed reunions with *Mace* superfans at the Atsugi and Iwakuni Friendship Festivals, and embraced the exclusive honor of walking the hallowed, volcanic earth of Iwo Jima as we conducted field carrier landing practice (FCLP) in preparation for deployment.

Until next time and see you all at Hook ... Cheers and MIYF!

DAMBUSTERS PREPARE FOR HISTORIC DEPLOYMENT

by CDR Justin "Corndog" Reddick and LT Chadd Russell, USN
Picking up where we last left off, the VFA-195 Dambusters
completed a successful deployment in the fall of 2023 after making our
historic pilgrimage to the Hwacheon Dam. Upon return to home port,
the squadron was rewarded with some much-deserved post overseas
movement leave. But no sooner had the calendar turned to 2024 than we
found ourselves back at it again in preparation for the next patrol cycle.
Early 2024 was busier than most years on record for FDNF in Japan with
combined visits from Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet
inspectors who conducted a Maintenance Program Assist (MPA) and a
Material Condition Inspection (MCI). The squadron and air wing team
also received some dedicated corrosion training from the inspectors,
which folded their inspections into an MCI reset designed to maximize
corrosion prevention and treatment knowledge for all maintainers. In the
end, the Dambusters racked up air wing leading scores for both the MPA
and MCI.

The months of January and February were also particularly busy for the *Dambusters*' social calendar. The ready room said farewell to LT Kyle "Low-T" Camilli en route to Strike Fighter Weapons School Pacific with the inaugural Buster Olympics. A mere two weeks later, LT Charles "The Lorax" White was bailed with a Buster bonfire on his way to the VX-9 *Vampires*. The final winter farewell was held for LCDR Tom "FISTY" Flynn as he made the move to our nation's capital for his prestigious assignment to the Joint Staff. The ready room also participated in the annual *Badman* sports week. Although our efforts were noble, the squadron reluctantly surrendered the Kin Bukuro trophy to the VAQ-141 *Shadowhawks* at the 2024 *Badman* Ball.

But, as many of you have learned, no good deed (or score) goes unpunished. As soon as the *Badman* Ball wrapped, the *Dambusters* were preparing to take six of our expertly groomed F/A-18Es to Andersen AFB in Guam to support the CVW-5 SFARP det. With an on-time and worry-free arrival by (almost) all CVW-5 fixed-wing squadrons, the *Dambusters* settled into our shore-based home away from home for some invaluable multimission training. At the time of this writing, we can confirm that target island Farallon de Medinilla (FDM) is cold and that the land bridge is still intact.

Following the successful Guam det, where the squadron racked up an impressive 100 percent sortie completion rate, we took some time to keep up foreign relations by conducting our first *Dambuster* Dining Out since before the pandemic. This year's venue was the beautiful Grand Prince Hotel in Hiroshima. Although the staff was apprehensive at first and maybe a little more so when dinner rolls began to fly, it was a huge success! During the event, the opportunity was afforded (directed) to everyone to make their way to the ceremonial Chippy green grog in order to atone for their egregious offenses.

Amid the flying bread rolls, the relaxing of the springs and some lighthearted humor, the squadron said farewell to training officer LCDR Bobby "Juice" Ward and senior LSO LT Chris ">SADCLAM<" Houben as these tactical savages moved to the VFA-27 *Royal Maces* and Strike Fighter Weapons School Atlantic, respectively. The squadron also hailed two new *Dambusters*, LT Braden "SLIP" Miller as Chippy training officer, and LTJG Jake "FNG" Lindow. It may be too soon to tell, but we think we might receive an invitation back to the Grand Prince next year (probably).

The Dambusters pictured in front of a squadron jet at MCAS lvakuni with recently departed department head LCDR Tom "FISTY" Flynn welcoming his newborn child to the squadron.

APPL PATRICA CORRIGAN

AMALIAN

AMA

Page 58 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 59

With the *Dambuster* Dining Out in the books, the squadron once again shifted its focus to the Iwo Jima FCLP det. Rumors of the newly active volcano just south of invasion beach known as "Nickels Island" rapidly spread throughout the air wing. While no attempts were made to conduct a ceremonial flag raising on Nickels Island, the temptation was almost too much to bear for some *Badman* JOs. This year's visit to the island was particularly memorable as VFA-195 Command Master Chief Manny "Fresh" Valle, a former Fleet Marine Force corpsman, was able to make his first visit to its hallowed grounds. After summiting Mount Suribachi, he was able to witness the same vantage point that U.S. Marines and U.S. Navy corpsmen viewed for the first time 79 years ago.

Following the invaluable training value and professional development that can come only with a det to Iwo Jima, the *Dambusters* onloaded and set sail on board USS *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76) for our scheduled patrol within the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility. The first half of the 2024 patrol included the biannual joint exercise with the U.S. Air Force, *Valiant Shield 2024*. This has become a mainstay for CVW-5 and offers incredible integration opportunities for aircrew to plan and work side by side with USAF counterparts. This year's highlights included a sinking exercise and several other cooperative events in the vicinity of Guam. But as the saying goes, "pics or it didn't happen." *Valiant Shield 2024* would not have been complete without the obligatory photo exercise displaying our joint USN and USAF firepower.

Looking ahead as we steam toward San Diego, the squadron is eagerly anticipating the historic fly-in to NAS North Island. When *Reagan* arrives pier-side, the squadron will be making the move back to its former FDNF home on board USS *George Washington* (CVN 73). The entire air wing will also head north to participate in Air Wing Fallon, its first in nine years. Before making our trek north, the *Dambusters* will conduct a Change of Command during which CDR Justin "Corndog" Reddick will relieve CDR Mike "Mitch" Shaughnessy. As far as we know, this is the first time that VFA-195 has conducted a Change of Command in the U.S. since the squadron first forward deployed to Japan in 1986. But not to be outdone by this fact, and almost as if preordained, the 2024 Tailhook symposium will fall exactly during our squadron's time in Fallon. Current and former *Dambusters*, please be sure to join us at the CVW-5 admin at the GSR where we can raise a Chu-Hi with some Chippy Pride and Chippy Style. For the *Dambusters*, CHIPPY HO!

Page 60

VAQ-141 SHADOWHAWKS by LTJG Caroline Buzzard, USN

The VAQ-141 *Shadowhawks*, a forward-deployed electronic attack squadron stationed at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, is a community of highly motivated individuals dedicated to mission success. We sustained the highest level of performance and maintained unparalleled levels of readiness through our participation in numerous large-force exercises (LFE) both within and outside of CVW-5. Most notably, at the end of March the *Shadowhawks* provided kinetic and non-kinetic support for F-16 squadrons during an LFE at the Japan Air Self-Defense Force's Misawa AB. The success of this training exercise solidified our ability to successfully integrate with and support Joint platforms when placed in a hostile environment.

Being forward deployed presents us the unique opportunity to interact with the Japanese community and display our professionalism. The *Shadowhawks* participated in two Friendship Festivals, one of which took place at NAF Atsugi, and the other at home field in Iwakuni. VAQ-141 provided two *Growlers*, equipped with ALQ-99 jamming pods, as static displays for the thousands of aviation enthusiasts in attendance.

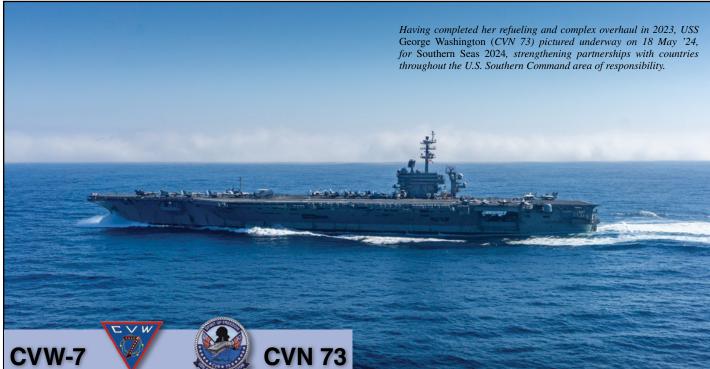
As deployment approached, the *Shadowhawks* transitioned our training schedule to prioritize safe and expeditious carrier operations. In addition to the Sailors who worked tirelessly to successfully prepare the aircraft for numerous mission sets, aircrew re-hacked their carrier landing skills during FCLP on the historic island of Iwo Jima. The *Shadowhawks* deeply appreciated the incredible and humbling opportunity to once again train on such sacred grounds for both American and Japanese military forces. The completion of this training proved VAQ-141's combat readiness as we soon set sail on board *Ronald Reagan*.

While many new faces joined the VAQ-141 family, the *Shadowhawks* recently bid farewell to five valued members of the team. CDR Joshua "lil' b" Menks left VAQ-141 with follow on orders to USINDOPACOM in Hawaii. LCDR Bryant "Tiny Dancer" Smith moved to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, LCDR Nicholas "Spaniel" Lindsay reported to VAQ-138. LT Collin "S2MOG" Bolton headed to VAQ-129 while LT Ryan "Rufus" Hanisco received orders to VT-9 at NAS Meridian, Miss.

ABH3 Charles Cuevas directs an EA-18G Growler assigned to the VAQ-141 Shadowhawks on the flight deck of Reagan on 19 Mar '24.



The Hook, Summer 2024





USS *George Washington* CAPT Timothy L. Waits CVW-7 CAPT Alex Hampton



"We look forward to building readiness and advancing training as we engage with our friends and partners in South America," stated RADM Robert Westendorff, Commander, *Carrier Strike Group Ten*. Not only is CVW-7 ready to support with various subject matter experts, but members of the air wing have been wingmen to the strike group staff in support of engagements with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay. It has been a team effort, and *Team Freedom* is excited to support the mission.

FLYING THE SOUTHERN SEAS

by LT Ray "Sunshine" Sudduth, USN

quadrons throughout CVW-7 have not throttled back since the 2023 deployment on board USS *George H.W. Bush* (CVN 77). Over the past six months the air wing prepared to embark USS *George Washington* (CVN 73) this summer to support U.S. Southern Command and *U.S. Fourth Fleet's Southern Seas 2024* deployment. This will ultimately culminate with *GW* relieving USS *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76) and returning to Yokosuka, Japan in 2024.

It has been an all-hands effort at CVW-7 to support this return to Forward-Deployed Naval Forces. *Freedom Fighters* squadrons executed a successful Tailored Ship's Training Availability (TSTA) in February during which carrier qualifications (CQ), Mission Commander syllabus events, and unit-level training qualified not only aircrews, but also flight-deck personnel. While it has been a busy quarter, the support of *Southern Seas 2024* has not slowed down the successes of CVW-7.

The VFA-103 *Jolly Rogers* continue to excel as the only F/A-18E/F composite squadron for the U.S. Navy. These pioneers ultimately support commanders with the data needed in shaping the Air Wing of the Future and earned the Retention Excellence Award in the process. As the weight comes on to support *Southern Seas 2024*, the HSC-5 *Nightdippers* continue to crunch their power calculations now to support distinguished visitor movements with partner nations. The *Nightdippers* can't be weighed down as they earned the Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic Battle Effectiveness Award for Calendar Year 2023, while the Naval Helicopter Association awarded LT Christopher "Boucher" Jacobsen Pilot of the Year for 2023. Additionally, LCDR Kyle "Dobby" Anderson from the VFA-147 *Argonauts* was named Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMNAVAIRPAC) Pilot of the Year while the squadron earned the McClusky Award.

The caliber of excellence demonstrated throughout CVW-7 makes *Team Freedom* the ultimate ambassadors for Naval Aviation throughout the region.

VFA-103 JOLLY ROGERS

by LT Tyson "Wilson" Stickler, USN edited by ENS Jack "Bones" Ernie, USN

Since the *World-Famous Jolly Rogers* last checked in, the squadron has undergone some fairly incredible changes. Many photos of the "One-Eyed Jacks" have made their way across the internet, and the rumors are true. On 17 October, VFA-103 welcomed the first of three F/A-18E aircraft to the flight line, officially making it the first deploying composite strike fighter squadron in the Navy. The squadron has used these single-seat jets in all aspects of training and operations in order to ensure that our aircrew receive the required qualifications and to provide feedback to the Navy on how the composite squadron model is working.

MC3 August Clawson, USN



An F/A-18F Super Hornet assigned to the VFA-103 Jolly Rogers launches into stormy skies over the Atlantic Ocean during George Washington's Tailored Ships Training Availability and Final Evaluation Problem (TSTA/FEP), 18 Feb '24.

The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 61

VFA-103 has also been hard at work boosting military and civilian relations by conducting flyovers at the United States Naval Academy, the Pittsburgh Steelers' Acrisure Stadium, the Reno Air Races, Hampton University and for the 80th anniversary of NAS Oceana. The *Jolly Rogers* also provided aircraft for multiple air shows around the country and at the Girls Rock Aviation Convention in Atlanta, Ga., promoting women in aviation. LT Tristan "Eyestalkio" Dmitrijev found these public relations events especially rewarding as he was able to share the passion he has for the strike fighter community. He shared his thoughts on his experiences by saying, "It's great to pass along the honored traditions and share with the world a slice of what we do in our day-to-day lives, just like my mentors have done for me." The squadron also worked to improve morale for our ships at sea by executing air power demonstrations for the families of Sailors attached to CVN 77 and CVN 73 on their friends and family day underways.

The *Jolly Rogers* ended the year with a detachment (det) on board CVN 73, conducting CQ and cyclic operations, the latter the first for *George Washington* since 2017. Along with a three-week TSTA, this underway prepared the squadron for its *Southern Seas 2024* deployment, which began in April. As of this writing we are steaming around South America to bring *GW* to San Diego before the ship is handed over to CVW-5 and transitions to her new home port in Japan. While on board, a change-of-command ceremony marked the handing over of the reins to CDR Jonathan "Paddles" Gilliom by CDR Jeffrey "Creature" Creighan. Fair winds and following seas, sir! And as always, Here's to Victory! Here's to the Bones!

FLYING SOUTH FOR THE SUMMER

by LT Nicholas "Squash Dome" Ruiz, USN

It has been a busy year for the VFA-147 *Argonauts* with preparations to conduct a home port change, a deployment and support to multiple air wings. Since taking command in November 2023, CDR Christopher "Penguin" Case has led the squadron across the country three times to work with CVW-7 and *George Washington*, the most recent journey culminating in the start of the squadron's first deployment since 2021.

MC3 Max Biesecker, USN

In two brief underway periods leading up to it, the *Argonauts* achieved another first for the F-35C, becoming the first *Lighting II* fleet squadron to integrate with an East Coast air wing and ship. Lessons learned from those two periods at sea have set up the *GW*/CVW-7 team for success as it starts the journey around South America.

While preparing for deployment, the *Argonauts* supported TOPGUN and Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One (MAWTS-1) and participated in the first *Panther Flag* hosted by the 422d Test and Evaluation Squadron out of Nellis AFB. This exercise was the first-of-its-kind event, bringing together 28 F-35s from the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force from six different bases in the region to fly and fight in the Nevada Test and Training Range against threats replicating a peer adversary. The exercise served to codify distributed maritime operations tactics, techniques and procedures while testing advanced datalinks and shared mission planning across all three services.

In addition to supporting a busy flight schedule, the *Argo* maintenance department has continued to set the standard for what professional maintenance on the Navy's only fifth-generation platform looks like. While maintaining a nearly flawless sortic completion rate, our maintainers completed three major inspections. In November, the squadron completed the COMNAVAIRPAC Aviation Maintenance Inspection with a score of 91 and Conventional Weapons Technical Proficiency Inspection with a perfect score. In February, the maintenance department crushed the Commander, Joint Strike Fighter Wing Material Condition Inspection with an above-average score on both aircraft inspected, emphasizing low observable maintenance critical to the survivability of the platform.

The hard work of the entire squadron and its people did not go unnoticed. Most recently, the *Argonauts* were honored with the 2023 RADM C. Wade McClusky Award, and our maintenance officer, LCDR Kyle "Dobby the House Elf" Anderson, received the COMNAVAIRPAC Pilot of the Year.

Additionally, as a testament to his leadership and professionalism, LS1 Adams was selected as a finalist for COMNAVAIRPAC Sailor of the Year. Along with these achievements, the esteemed *Argonaut* JOPA has had a magnificent start to 2024. LTs John "Princess Peach" Kretzschmar, Charles "Candace" Lohmann and Benjamin "FIGJAM" Marquis all





earned Light Thermal Weapon Sight (LTWS) Level III Four-Ship Flight Lead qualifications. Additionally, LTs Kevin "Pant" Heesacker, Chris "Ryszard Jerzy Kuklinski" Kuczynski and Carter "Fogell" Olson completed LTWS Level II Two-Ship Flight Lead qualifications, setting the *Argos* up for success both at Air Wing Fallon later this year and in our integration with CVW-5. Damn Proud!

VAW-116 GOES COAST-TO-COAST

by LT Brady Watson, USN

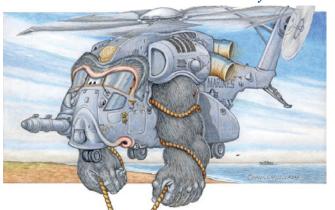
In February 2024, the *Sun Kings* traveled across the country from NBVC Point Mugu, to NavSta Norfolk to support TSTA while underway on board CVN 73, marking VAW-116's first official exercise as part of CVW-7. Previously, from October 2012 to December 2023, the squadron proudly served as part of CVW-17, deploying with *Team Quicksand* for the last time on board USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68) from December 2022 through June 2023. On this deployment, VAW-116 participated in tri-carrier operations, executed three large-force exercises and assisted in a Defense Support of Civil Authority operation. To make this all possible, the *Sun Kings'* maintainers worked relentlessly and boasted a 93 percent sortie completion rate by the end of deployment despite logistical setbacks.

Returning home, the squadron completed a Sustainment Exercise and Air Wing Fallon during August–September 2023 to conclude its time in CVW-17.

Since then, the *Sun Kings* have been preparing for the transition to the *Freedom Fighters*, supporting various events that included the U.S. Air Force's Weapons School Integration at Nellis AFB and even a flyover for the University of Oregon vs. Cal college football game in November. In January, the squadron began field carrier landing practice in preparation for TSTA before flying three aircraft across the country to support this event on board *GW*. VAW-116 played a critical role while underway as it helped the ship's crew conduct cyclic operations for the first time since starting its midlife refueling and complex overhaul in 2017.

The *Sun Kings* are excited to join CVW-7 for *Southern Seas* 2024 and will use our experience in CVW-17 to lead the way!

Announcing ... HANK CARUSO'S AEROCATUREStm CALENDAR for 2025!



The 2025 Aerocaturestm Calendar includes: CH-53K (shown); F-84 Thunderjet ZELL; YF-12 Kedlock; YB-58 Hustler; F/A-18 high trap; OH-6A Cayuse; Space Shuttle Solar Max rescue; XF-10F Jaguar; USNTPS F/A-18 & UH-60; F-4G Wild Weasel; F9F rubber runway; F-89D Scorpion; & Seabirds: Swim Test. Calendar size 8.5" x 11. Prints & books also available. Discount of 10% for orders of 5 or more calendars.

Calendar is still only \$20 each. Shipping: \$5 (1 calendar) OR \$10 (for total order of 2 or more calendars). Maryland residents add 6% SALES TAX. Prices for shipping outside the US and wholesale orders available on request. Not responsible for shipping damage. No cash, CODs, or credit cards. Orders must be in US dollars redeemable through a US agent. Calendar will be available in late August 2024.

FOREFEATHERStm ENTERPRISES

44618 Rolling Oak Lane, Dept. H; California, MD 20619 USA www.aerocatures.com

HSC-5 "RESCUES, PROTECTS AND DELIVERS" IN 2024

The World-Famous Nightdippers of HSC-5 have deployed again just one year removed from our return from U.S. Sixth Fleet with the George H.W. Bush Strike Group. This time we are operating on board George Washington for Southern Seas 2024.

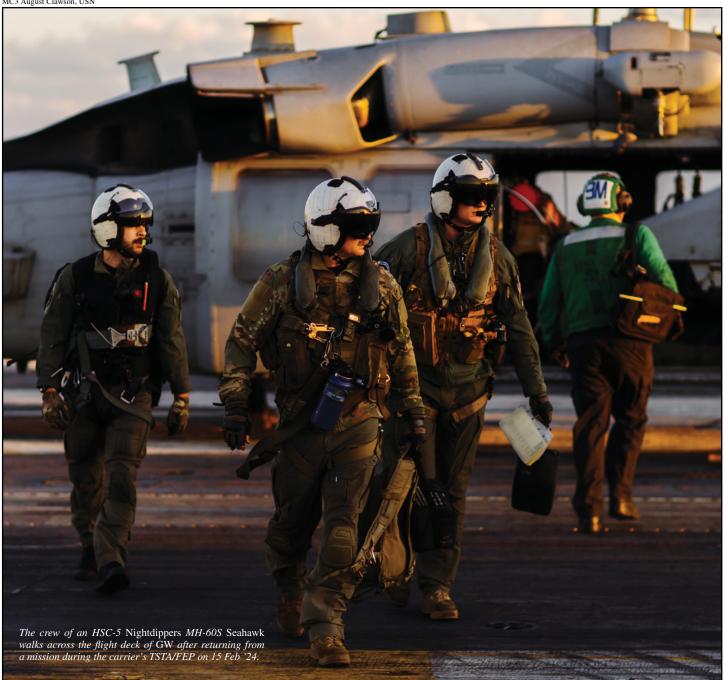
The squadron has excelled in the time between deployments despite ongoing sea and shore tasking, inspection and evaluation season and challenges caused by evolving Ship Self-Defense underway support requirements. Over the past year, HSC-5 successfully supported six dets, including carrier qualifications, an air wing underway, TSTA and shore support to CVN 73's Board of Inspection and Survey evolutions. The squadron also executed high-value training with Marine Forces Special Operations Command, including three full mission profile events, accomplishing increased readiness requirements for *Southern Seas 2024* and long-term preparations for the next Optimized-Fleet Response Plan.

Sailors at HSC-5 have also thrived through a season of evaluations, including the most recent Aviation Maintenance Inspection, where the squadron scored an impressive 84 percent. Fresh looks into our Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization and search-andrescue (SAR) programs, as well as a Tactics Assist Visit by the HSC MC3 August Clawson, USN

Weapons School, validated the squadron's safe and effective operations and provided an opportunity to improve common problem areas for the fleet. Recently, the *Nightdippers* were excited to learn we had earned the Fiscal Year 2023 Battle "E," a testament to the squadron's performance during its last deployment and the transition to *George Washington*.

HSC-5 currently flies and maintains six MH-60S *Seahawks* on the *Southern Seas 2024* deployment. The squadron was originally scheduled to execute operations on board *George Washington* with three primary aircraft available (PAA), which then increased to four PAA after comparing airframe capacity models to expected operational requirements. Finally, HSC-5 increased to six PAA in order to mitigate risk to logistics operations incurred by ongoing V-22 *Osprey* maintenance requirements. The squadron is prepared to support all strike group SAR, medical evacuation and logistics, including multiple division-sized head of state distinguished visitor missions, as well high-value unit defense and carrier force protection operations.

The *World-Famous Nightdippers* remain dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of fleet support, and we are proud to serve as a critical member of *Team Freedom*. We are grateful for the opportunity to RESCUE, PROTECT and DELIVER.



CVW-8







USS *Gerald R. Ford* CAPT Rick Burgess

CVW-8 CAPT Dan S. Catlin



FELIX HAPPENINGS

by LT Victoria "Pfingers" Krause, USN

Team Felix is back at it again, thankfully home after a nine-month cruise. During the last couple of months in sustainment phase, we have been taking some well-deserved rest. When not enjoying leave, the *Tomcatters* have been hard at work leading the strike fighter weapons and tactics (SFWT) pain train in CVW-8. Felix is proud to announce the production of both a Level III and Level IV candidate in LTs Jake "G-Rex" Gustaf and Jon "Lt Dan" Hawkins. Additionally, after a year of not receiving fresh blood, the *Tomcatters* picked up a British exchange pilot, LT Lewis "Jiff McDims" Phillips. Although JOPA was skeptical at first, the young felines think he fits in quite nicely with the rest of the litter. LCDR Steven "Hucker" Slaugh finally returned to the squadron after three months of temporary active duty for a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency Fellowship in Washington D.C.

The squadron is sad to report the loss of *Felix* Actual and its senior JO, CDR Jordan "Gonzie" Mayo and the aforementioned Lt Dan, respectively. No longer with us, these cats are moving on to bigger and better things. Skipper (Ret) will be the operations officer on board USS *George W. Bush* (CVN 77), and Lt Dan will be the best instructor VFA-122 has ever seen. Rest in peace, Skipper (Ret) and Lt Dan. We are happy to announce CDR Wes "Wooly Willy" Mize as new skipper and CDR Robert "STORC" Gordon as executive officer. Additionally, we welcome Mississippi's finest, LCDR Sam "POM POM" Dulaney, as the squadron's new safety officer.

The highlight of sustainment phase was the VFA-31 Dining Out in April. The wardroom enjoyed a fun, morale-enhancing event, but did not enjoy the "hangziety-ridden" morning(s) after. The *Tomcatters* started work ups for the upcoming deployment cycle at the end of May and are set to cruise again in mid-2025 on board USS *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN 78). As always, *Felix* Rules!

TIME ASHORE LEAVES A MARK

by LT Chris "Twitch Pig" Cantillo, USN

In August 1968, a Frenchman named Bernard Moitessier departed Plymouth, England, on board his sailing yacht Joshua in an attempt to become the first man to solo circumnavigate the globe as part of the *Sunday Times* Golden Globe Race. After six months of perilous sailing in the Southern Ocean, Moitessier rounded Cape Horn in a position to win. As he began the final leg back to England, he was overcome by a profound realization and rendezvoused with a nearby cargo ship to slingshot a written message onto the deck. It informed the world that he was dropping out of the race, ceding victory to an Englishman in a characteristically French fashion and foregoing his return to Europe, "because I am happy at sea and perhaps to save my soul." He then turned southeast, leaving his family and secular temptations behind in France to sail another six months to Tahiti and start a new life.

In May 2023, a group of American VFA-87 JOs departed NavSta Norfolk on board *Gerald R. Ford* in her attempt to become the first *Ford*-class carrier to successfully deploy. On the way home after nine months at sea, these young aviators came to the same realization as Moitessier and lobbied the captain to turn the ship around to return to the Adriatic Sea and complete more SFWT training sorties. Unfortunately, many of the personnel aboard lacked devotion to the sea and the ship instead returned to shore.

Contrary to popular belief, extended shore life can be quite dangerous for Sailors, none more so than the VFA-87 JOs. Land sickness (sometimes



VFA-31 JOPA take an evening cigar break during a pause in flight operations on board USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN78) during the Tomcatters' most recent deployment.

referred to as hangovers), bankruptcy, law enforcement, ground jobs, nofly days and duty — all of these evils and more combined to challenge our brave protagonists daily while their war machines sat idle on the flight line. They had heard the stories of the dreaded maintenance phase, but the rumors could not prepare them for what it was really like. There are slick jets with no JOs current in basic fighter maneuvering, blue bird days with only in the loop (ITL) tracks with which to merge, cross countries over weekends with "family commitments." As one JO so eloquently put it, "At least there are no screaming kids on the boat."

Thankfully, Skipper Clifton "Grey Wolf" Lennon was no stranger to adversity and had a plan in mind to save the squadron's esprit de corp. It arose from the deepest depths of naval tradition — matching tattoos. Astute readers of this fine publication will remember the initial JO push for tattoos in Key West in late 2022, but VFA-87's front office made the prescient assessment that nothing strikes fear into the enemy's heart or inspires a JO like middle-aged O-5s with tomahawk tattoos. The plan was a resounding success. With an unprecedented 80 percent tattoo uptake rate for VFA-87 pilots, those ITL tracks don't stand a chance.

/FA-87



Brave maintenance phase warriors from VFA-87 prepare to attrite virtual bandits in support of strike fighter weapons and tactics training.

Page 64 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 65





USS Abraham Lincoln **CAPT Pete Riebe** CVW-9

CAPT Gerry Tritz



TEAM SHOGUN

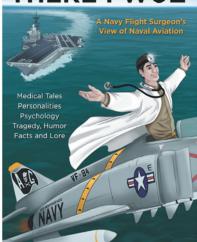
by LT Cory "Juicy" Couture, USN

reetings, fellow Tailhook members! CVW-9 dove into work ups with a group of Naval Aviators and Sailors chomping at the bit for our 2024 deployment. Our team enthusiastically embraces the principles of "Agile, Disciplined, Lethal," carrying on the legacy of our predecessors.

In April, Team Shogun successfully wrapped up Air Wing Fallon (AWF) having the privilege of inaugurating a new rigorous syllabus. The Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center (NAWDC) did a fantastic job of instructing, fostering a performance-driven environment and providing a robust Red Air picture. When not preparing or executing the mission, we seized the opportunity to participate in the grand reopening of NAS Fallon's officers club. Alongside the numerous sorties flown, we conducted many sorties at the o'club and beer die tables. Highlighting the synergy of CVW-9, we operated at full capacity both in the air and on the ground. Team Shogun's readiness remains unwavering, and with the completion of AWF our Katana stands razor-sharp, at the ready and eagerly awaiting the next challenge.

After weeks at NAS Fallon, we proceeded to our Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX), our final work-up evaluation on board USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72). During this monthlong underway, we completed the final stages of advanced tactical training, underwent thorough evaluation and obtained the necessary certifications for *Carrier* Strike Group Three (CSG-3) to proceed with deployment. Achieving the rigorous metrics necessary for final certification will require the diligent efforts of every officer and Sailor within Team Shogun, Abe, and CSG-3. As our team approaches the culmination of work ups, we're firing on all cylinders and primed for the challenge ahead!





James A. White, III, M.D. (LCDR, USNR)

'Great read. inusual in that Navy Flight Surgeons seldom comment on life on the carriers. Superbly written...another perspective of Navy Life at sea and a doctor's

Warm Regards, Captain Dan A. Pedersen (USN, Retired). ounder of the "TOPGUN" Navy Fighter Weapons School in 1969 and Skipper of USS Ranger (CV-61) in 1982.

Also, an excellent overview or family and friends of al Aviators: carrier, the culture of naval aviation, challenges and rewards, physical risks and emotional stresses. deployment, etc...giving non aviator readers a feeling of being there.

HOW TO ORDER

512 Pages, \$28.50...Discounted to \$23.50 & free shipping CONUS For direct orders from the author, James White, 2920 Jackson Street, Alexandria, LA 71301 [Email: WUZBOOKS@gmail.com] Send your name, address, phone, email, # of copies & check. Or, Order Online at Archwaypublishing.com/en/bookstore, or from Amazon, BarnesandNoble, your local bookstore.

We would also like to recognize and extend our appreciation to those who have departed the *Shogun* pattern and offered invaluable mentorship before their departure. A heartfelt thank you also goes out to the squadron commanding officers who have had or will have their Changes of Command prior to deployment. This appreciation extends to CDR Dan "Squirrel" Berry from VAW-117, CDR Matthew "Flo" Diederich from VFA-151 and CDR Dave "Duck" Miceli from HSC-14. We salute you, and you stand relieved. We have the watch!

To those deployed, *Team Shogun* eagerly awaits the opportunity to relieve you. Until then, we raise our glass and toast to you. "HERE'S TO THOSE IN MARSHAL!"

VFA-41 BLACK ACES

by LTJG Jack "Smol Town" Freischlag, USN

As the year progresses, the VFA-41 Black Aces are keeping up the high ops tempo that started 2024 and remain in the middle of the Optimized-Fleet Response Plan (OFRP) work-up cycle. January and February saw the squadron participate in *Lincoln's* Tailored Ship's Training Availability (TSTA) final evaluation problem along with the other squadrons of CVW-9. It was a successful evolution in which the entire squadron performed at a high level. In April, the *Black Aces* took part in AWF at Fallon.

We have welcomed a few new faces. LCDRs Ethan "Snorcats" Connors and Matt "Chicken" Faulkner joined as new department heads, and the Aces are excited to have them as part of the team. We also congratulate many of our recent strike fighter weapons and tactics



A VFA-41 Black Aces F/A-18F Super Hornet pictured on the catapult just before launching from Lincoln during Carrier Strike Group Three's Composite Training Unit Exercise, 14 May '24.

(SFWT) graduates. LTs Jack "ALeC" Gasper, Mackenzie "Glinda" Kirschner, Trent "M@LD" Rudd, Thomas "GBIV" Trouche and Robert "S.A.L.S.A." Fitzpatrick all completed Level II. LTs Steven "Dump" Price, Joel "Gator" Heindel, Zachary "Brother Bilo" Smith, Nicholas "Bluebird" Martens and Aaron "DTD" Banko completed Level III. LT Steven "Dump" Price also completed Level IV. Those completing SFWT Level IV+ include LTs Michael "Rippa" Shuey, Ciar "Hulk" Colgan and LCDR Charles "Tummy 6" Cummings. We're proud of their hard work and continuing devotion to their professions. LCDR Cummings and LT Dan "Roach" Morgan also completed their forward air controller (airborne) qualification in May. Executive Officer CDR Michael "Shady" McBryar could not be prouder of their accomplishments.

The squadron would like to extend a congratulations to Rippa and Hulk for being accepted to attend the fall TOPGUN course. The squadron will be sad to see them leave, but wish them the best of luck in their

In mid-May, the Black Aces joined with the entirety of CVW-9 for COMPTUEX on board Lincoln. Our objective for this evolution was to fully integrate with CVN 72 and become a deployable carrier strike group and air wing team. The squadron remains ready for any challenge at sea and excited for the opportunities it will provide.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Tailhook community and all those who support us. First to Fight, First to Strike!

VFA-14 TOPHATTERS

by LT Jacob "CAMP" LeJeune, USN

The VFA-14 Tophatters began the spring season transitioning to the advanced phase of work ups with our return from Lincoln's TSTA. Squadron members participated in the Integrated Air Defense Course at NAS Fallon as a prequel to CVW-9's AWF detachment (det) while others attended Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) I and II out of NAS North Island.

The Lids spent most of March and April as part of the AWF det, a key test to integrate CVW-9 assets in all phases of combat for our upcoming 2024 deployment. Each squadron member quickly learned the intensive mission planning process and executed multiple large-force exercises to test our strength as an air wing. With mentorship from the NAWDC staff, Shogun conducted numerous scenarios across all mission sets to ensure we are ready to answer our nation's call. Additionally, the Lid maintenance department exceeded all expectations and knocked the det out of the park, providing our pilots with 11 full mission capable jets in both the fighter and tanker configurations for the duration of AWF.

The Tophatters returned home to NAS Lemoore and continued our focus on SFWT progression and carrier qualification in preparation for COMPTUEX.





The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 67 Page 66



The *Lids* congratulate two of our pilots, LTs Jeremy "Pepe Silva" Ganse and Ronny "Downy" Hafeza, on earning SFWT Level III qualifications and beginning Level IV training. Lastly, we wish a fond farewell to LT Nikhil "Bing" Nair as he returns to Sherman Field at NAS Pensacola to begin his instructor tour with the VT-86 *Sabrehawks*. We know you will carry on our *Tophatters* legacy and professionalism as you head back to the "Cradle of Naval Aviation." From the Oldest and Boldest squadron on the flight line, we wish you the best!

VAQ-133 WIZARDS

by LT Cody "FNG" Horst, USN

The VAQ-133 *Wizards* have had a productive spring while training for a deployment with CSG-3 during *Abraham Lincoln's* TSTA, *Bamboo Eagle* and AWF.

These exercises were geared toward the high-end fight, and proved incredibly challenging and productive, forging new leaders among the *Wizard JOPA*. LTs Aaron "Nomega" Sanderson, Scott "Mezpen" Swegle, Jeff "Smooth Brain" Jernigan and Michael "Mikey Meatballs" Kennedy have all earned *Growler* Weapons and Tactics Program (GWTP) Level IV Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses Lead designations. LTs Kevin "Mr. Weeboto" Vicencio, Keith "Yertle the Salty Sea Turtle" Henzer and LT Daniel "Chin Diesel" Jones, USN

Samir "Stuka" Patel successfully earned GWTP Level III *Growler* Mission Commander qualifications. Finally, LTs Zachery "Mad Libs" Miller and Cody "FNG" Horst have completed GWTP Level II Combat Wingman syllabi.

We are pleased to welcome the following officers to the squadron: LCDR AJ "Frodo" Dobransky as our tactics department head and LTs Tommy Wickum, Jerry Kigerl and Abby Savidge.

WALLBANGERS FIRST TO BRING DSSC-4 AND AR TO THE FIGHT

by LT Daniel "Chin Diesel" Jones, USN

The *World-Famous Wallbangers* of VAW-117 are nearing the end of the OFRP cycle in preparation for our upcoming deployment with CVW-9 on board CVN 72. The squadron will be the first to deploy equipped with Delta System Software Configuration-Four (DSSC-4) and aerial refueling (AR).

VAW-117 completed TSTA in February and AWF in April. DSSC-4 enables the *Wallbangers* to operate more effectively in a wider set of missions while AR from F/A-18 *Super Hornets* and KC-135 *Stratotankers* creates more persistent command and control (C2) coverage. These capabilities enhance CGS-3's preparation for deployment and will deliver the C2 while underway.



In a ceremony held in the VAW-117 hangar on 8 March 2024, the squadron bid farewell to CDR Dan "Squirrel" Berry and welcomed CDR Paul "Snooki" Reyes as commanding officer and CDR Michael "Hansel" Boyle as executive officer.

HSM-71 RAPTORS

by LT Addison "Dirt Bag" Fine, USN

The HSM-71 Raptors rang in the New Year gearing up for our upcoming 2024 deployment with Team Shogun. Before departing on TSTA, nine crews completed the Helicopter Advanced Readiness Program, shooting five AGM-114 Hellfire missiles and tracking and executing simulated kills on ten Mk 30 Anti-Submarine Warfare Training Targets. In January, the Raptors embarked Lincoln, USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. (DDG 121), USS Stockdale (DDG 106) and USS Spruance (DDG 111), while HSM-37.4 embarked USS Michael Murphy (DDG 112). While the air wing completed TSTA with Lincoln, the combat elements and their ships successfully executed Surface Warfare Advanced Tactical Training before CSG-3 became whole and executed group sail.

The *Raptors* then packed our bags and flew four helicopters to NAS Fallon to shoot an additional nine *Hellfire* missiles, employ over 32,000 rounds of 7.62 mm and .50 cal. and conduct landings as high as 8,000 feet in the Pinecone Mountain Range. Returning home to San Diego to continue training over the water, the squadron continued to track and attack Mk 30s off the coast.

This year, the *Raptors* have already qualified three new Helicopter Aircraft Commanders — LTs Chris "Gusher" Marquis, Justin "SKAB" Lambeth and Reagan "Frizzle" Stromback — in addition to four Air Combat Training Continuum (ACTC) Level III pilots and five ACTC Level II sensor operators.

After performing maintenance on nine helicopters to earn a Helicopter Maritime Strike Wing Pacific high score on the 2024 Aviation Maintenance Inspection and successfully completing a Commander, Naval Air Forces unit NATOPS inspection, the *Raptors* are ready to answer the nation's call. Armed with the experience, knowledge and lethality cultivated in work ups thus far, we have our eyes set on COMPTUEX and beyond. First and Finest!



Matt Tillet, an F-8 Crusader pilot, is shot down over North Vietnam in 1966, just one week before his ship would be heading home after his second back-to-back six-month tour. Escaping from his spiraling out-of-control jet with only seconds to spare, and evading for all of three minutes, he becomes a Prisoner of War. Surviving torture, months of solitary confinement and the infamous Hanoi March, the dream of returning home to his wife and two children keeps him going. Repatriated in 1973, he returns to find his dream shattered.

Code of Conduct takes place in the middle of a war, however, it is not so much a blood and guts war novel as it is the emotional tale of a family tom apart by war, more than seven years of separation, and the long journey to reconstruct their lives.

The goal of Karen Black, the author, is to present the horrendous prisoner-of-war experience and the resulting shattered personal lives in the format of a novel.



Available at **amazon** in soft cover and in Kindle Please visit the author's web site, www.karenblack-author.com

MCSN Nathaly Cruz, USN



Page 68 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 69

MC2 Michael J. Clinton, USN







CVW-11 CAPT Ross Drenning



TEAM BARBWIRE

by LT Rob "Bummer Bag" Pierce, USN

western Pacific (WESTPAC) deployment as an integral part of *Carrier Strike Group Nine* (CSG-9) on board USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71). Setting sail for WESTPAC is the culmination of a year's effort preparing and training to meet the challenges of deployment.

Traveling from all corners of the country, the squadrons that compose CVW-11 came together aboard CVN 71 off San Diego for carrier qualification (CQ). Instituting an efficient cyclic style CQ plan, *Team Barbwire* completed all pilot qualifications ahead of schedule before CSG-9 sailed west. Hitting the ground running, the air wing participated in *Joint Battle Problem '24*, an exercise involving the integration of Navy and Air Force assets in the Hawaii operating area. This robust evolution required *Team Barbwire* to execute high-level training scenarios utilizing the skills acquired during the work-up cycle.

CSG-9 had the privilege to conduct dual carrier operations with CVW-2 on board USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70) as they returned home from deployment. *Barbwire* personnel spent time on board *Vinson* discussing lessons learned from CVW-2's deployment to ensure *Team Barbwire*'s

continued operational success. Additionally, CVW-11 and *Theodore Roosevelt* had the privilege to conduct flight operations with the F-35C *Lightning II* for the first time, courtesy of CVW-2.

The air wing has celebrated several Changes of Command in these first few months of deployment. CDR Nathan "Small Hands" Stein took command of the HSM-75 *Wolfpack* with CDR Jeffrey "Frank" Gruetzmacher as his executive officer (XO). CDR Frank "WUTA" Willis assumed command of the VAQ-137 *Rooks* with CDR David "Skippy" Steppe stepping in as XO. CDR Sean "Mouth" Stuart took the reins of the VFA-211 *Checkmates* with CDR Logan "JDUM" Peck as XO.

In April, CSG-9 conducted trilateral operations with our Japanese and South Korean allies. In addition to executing joint training, CSG-9 conducted a photo exercise involving multiple naval vessels from the U.S., Japan and Republic of Korea, as well as aircraft from every squadron in CVW-11.

Deployment thus far has certainly been rigorous, with the Sailors and officers of *Team Barbwire* and *Team Rough Rider* working diligently every day to ensure CSG-9 continues to meet its operational requirements. We have conducted port calls in Guam and Singapore, giving air wing and ship personnel a few days to enjoy some much-needed R&R before returning to their duties recharged and ready for action.

As deployment continues, *Barbwire* stands ready to continue to deliver "Speed and Violence" in WESTPAC.

BLACK KNIGHTS' GREEN THUMB

by LT Ryan "Boucher" O'Malley, USN

On day 100 on board *Theodore Roosevelt*, six *Black Knight* JOs shared the first harvest of jalapenos from the garden of 02-44-7-L. The homegrown fruits were sweet and spicy; their flavor accented with a dip of wardroom ranch and the satisfaction of reaping the rewards that we literally sowed. But it wasn't all rainbows and butterflies. This is a story of highs and lows, failure and persistence, and sabotage and heroism. This is the story of my green thumb journey on board *TR*.

MCSA Aaron Haro Gonzalez, USN



F/A-18F Super Hornets assigned to the VFA-154 Black Knights return to Theodore Roosevelt during operations in the South China Sea on 27 Mar '24.

It begins with a hydroponic system and a predeployment trip to Lowe's. What plant can live with no sunlight or soil? "Nothing," the employee said. So, I went across the street to Home Depot, where they told me I could grow it and they could help. I decided on microgreens, strawberries, jalapenos, and, as a true Hail Mary, sugar baby watermelon.

On the night we set sail, each little seed was soaked in a sponge and baked under a light bright enough to piss off every one of my roommates. I was optimistic for the seedlings, and for the *Knights*, unaware at the time how symbolic this moment would be.

In two weeks, we had steamed across the entire Pacific Ocean, and not a single seed had sprouted. I honestly believed nothing ever would, but this cruise was not destined for a fruitless endeavor. I noticed a crack in the jalapeno seed, and through it the tiniest hint of green emerged. Matching the initiative, the others soon followed, and the once lifeless steel trap was suddenly a delicate ecosystem.

Then devastation struck. Upon returning from a Guam port call, I was forced to bury at sea the remains of both the melon and the microgreens. The melon's demise came from within. He grew a root so strong that he suspended himself in midair above the sponge and was dehydrated to a crisp. But the case of the microgreens, it seemed, was a homicide. The jalapeno root system had invaded its neighboring sponge and subsequently strangled the microgreens to death.

In times of uncertainty, it is easy to lose sight of what is in and out of our control. Will my overnight Alert 30 launch tonight? Is Wi-Fi ever going to return so I can check the incidental charges from the admin? Are the strawberries going to be spicy because I accidentally crossbred them with my jalapenos? Probably, probably not and definitely. But we load that mission card, refresh that page and plant another seed, hoping for the best, because that's all we can do.

It has been 71 days since, and the jalapeno plant stands two feet tall. The very first strawberry is just now beginning to blush a gentle red. The watermelon, against all odds, returned with a healthy vine spiraling up its support rod. Unfortunately, the microgreens never sprouted again.

So, what does the future hold? Maybe the watermelon will wither and die again in unforeseen circumstances. And it's possible *TR* will get extended. But right now, there are flowers on the vine and the *Black Knights* are feeling inspired.

We're a strike fighter squadron that's earned the right to look back on the last four months of deployment and take pride in how far we've come. If these plants can survive a room inspection, what can't we accomplish? Through the ups and the downs, from the sow to the harvest, we will endure the journey, and we are ready for any turn that it takes. BKR!

VFA-211 TAKES ON WESTPAC

by LT Cole "Touchdown" Cathey, USN

VFA-211 has been busy the past couple of months settling into life at sea on board *Theodore Roosevelt*. We said, "fair winds and following seas" to our former skipper, CDR



MC3 Adina Phebus, USN



Page 70 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 71

"Dookie" Foard, on 1 March, during an airborne Change of Command in the South China Sea with CDR Sean "Mouth" Stuart now at the helm as the new commanding officer of the *Fighting Checkmates*.

We welcomed our new XO, CDR "JDUM" Peck, to Ready Room 7 and rapidly got him acquainted with our daily operations in the *Seventh Fleet* area of responsibility (AOR). First was to pull into Singapore two days after he arrived for a port call (he didn't even fly). Second, naturally, was to schedule him for a two-tanker flight day immediately after port! Welcome to the squadron, sir!

As the premier strike fighter (...and tanking) squadron in CVW-11, we are putting up the hours and racking up the traps! The squadron has seen a couple of members break 80 flight hours in a two-month period. For the first line period of deployment, the squadron received the air wing's Top Hook Award. Honorable mentions for our grade point average include Skipper Mouth as THE Top Hook, with LCDR "EDGYR" Murdock and LT "Mr. Giggles" Windham receiving Top 11 Ball Flyer honors (Mr. Giggles also received recognition as a Top Nugget).

In March we participated in a Crossing the Line ceremony. Slimy polliwogs infested the squadron, and it was glorious to see them washed clean through the crucible of the ceremony. Overall, it was a fantastic experience to take part in a time-honored tradition and see so many new trusty shellbacks.

We have lots of question marks regarding what our future holds and whether we remain in *Seventh Fleet* or move over to *Fifth Fleet*. No matter what happens, the *Checkmates* will continue to kick ass and NIKEL UP!

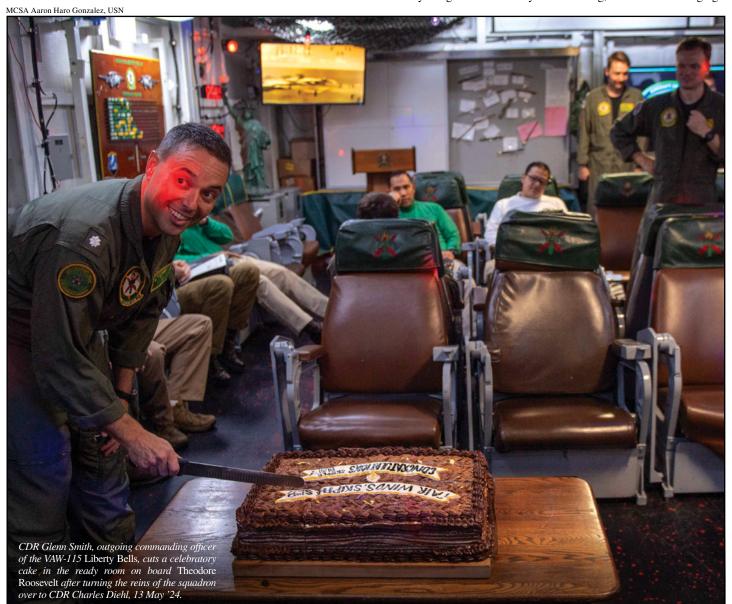
LIBERTY BELLS EMBRACE LIFE AT SEA

by LTJG Lilianna "Blender" Perez, USN

There's nothing like waking up to the smell of jet fuel and the sound of aircraft launching off the flight deck. The air is heavy, the sky is clear, engines are running, and adrenaline is pumping. It's a good day to fly and be a *Liberty Bell* in VAW-115. We have been hard at work in the Indo-Pacific AOR conducting freedom of navigation and deterrence operations, admirably protecting CSG-9 and *Theodore Roosevelt*. Most recently, we conducted a trilateral exercise with Japanese and South Korean naval forces, demonstrating strength and unity in the region.

The *Liberty Bells* continue to lead CVW-11 in proficiency and conducting air wing operations. With new faces gaining experience and qualifications, professional execution and technical expertise is held to the highest standard in order to lead the fleet. This, of course, is not possible without the hardworking maintainers performing the necessary maintenance on five E-2D *Advanced Hawkeyes* to facilitate the employment of all weapon systems across a variety of mission sets to include command and control coverage that is always in great demand. Their hard work and perseverance epitomize Naval Aviation as they work tirelessly day and night to support the fleet.

As the *Liberty Bells* hit our halfway mark on deployment and undergo a Change of Command, we remain flexible, lethal and ready to respond to our nation's call. We look forward to returning to our families and loved ones back at NBVC Point Mugu. Until then, we stay committed and ready to fight. When Liberty comes calling, the *Bells* come ringing.



CVW-17

USS Nimitz
CAPT Douglas Graber
CVW-17

CAPT Mike Kinter

Sen Airman Tiffany Del Oso, USAF

Maintenance phase activities for Team Quicksand squadrons included participation in the Naval Weapons System Evaluation Program, this VFA-94
Mighy Shrikes FA-18E pictured during operations at Tyndall AFB, Fla., on 14 Feb '24.

CVW-17 STAYS BUSY

Leam Quicksand squadrons and staff took full advantage of the air wing's abbreviated maintenance phase this spring. CAG staff conducted a golf outing Hail and Farewell at Ridge Creek Golf Club in Dinuba, Calif. After a closely contested match, a playoff decided the victor. In the end, CAG "Toona" Kinter sealed the win for his team with a birdie putt on the Par 3 16th. After much celebration, Team Quicksand honored the hard work of the 10 teammates who were moving on and heralded the arrival of eight fresh staff officers. Unfortunately, due to the busy staff schedule, not everyone could enjoy the sunny San Joaquin weather as several personnel attended Naval Planning Process training, facilitated by Tactical Training Group Pacific at NavBase Everett, Wash., in preparation for the upcoming work-up cycle.

During maintenance phase, *Team Quicksand* squadrons maximized training opportunities and supported various exercises. In January, VFA-146 and VAW-121 took advantage of the Integrated Training Facility at NAS Fallon, marking our first integrated event involving the recent addition of the E-2D *Advanced Hawkeye*. During the *Blue Diamonds* and *Bluetails* detachment (det), the VAQ-139 *Cougars* and HSC-6 *Indians* participated in *Red Flag 24-1* at Nellis AFB, gaining valuable Joint interoperability training. In February, the VFA-22 *Fighting Redcocks*, VFA-94 *Mighty Shrikes*, VFA-137 *Kestrels* and VFA-146 detached to Tyndall AFB in support of the Naval Weapons Systems Evaluation Program, successfully firing 11 AIM-9M *Sidewinder* missiles. Most recently, VAQ-139 ventured to Ellsworth AFB, S.D., to support *Global Lightning*.

In April, the air wing commenced the next Optimized-Fleet Response Plan (OFRP) cycle in earnest with the advanced readiness phase syllabi, training and readiness weapon expenditures prior to carrier qualification (CQ) and Flight-Deck Certification on board USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68) scheduled for July. While *Quicksand* squadrons build tactical proficiency, the CAG staff will be participating in various OFRP-related conferences and training symposiums, to include the inaugural Integrated Information Warfare and Maritime Fires Conference in San Diego.

On 24 July CAPT "Bob" Jaquith will relieve CAPT "Toona" Kinter as CAG during a Change of Command on board NAS Lemoore. *Team Quicksand* also looks forward to welcoming prospective Deputy CAG, CAPT Joshua "Rusty" Ales, who will attempt terminal velocity from Fortress Whidbey Island.

As a busy spring turns into a busy summer, CVW-17 will close out August as the first air wing to execute the newly revamped integrated Strike Fighter Advanced Readiness Program (SFARP) syllabus uniting our VFA, VAQ and VAW squadrons flying out of NAS Lemoore and NBVC Point Mugu. Once the debrief for our final event concludes, we will buster to Reno and look forward to seeing everyone at Hook '24!

VFA-137 KESTRELS

by LT Rob "Bummer Bag" Pierce, USN

Since our last report, the *Kestrels* have been "enjoying" maintenance phase and as of this writing have just wrapped up four weeks of air-to-surface SFARP here at NAS Lemoore. Single runway ops at home base have generally been a thorn in our side, but we are super excited to be getting new approach lights and a whole extra foot of width added to 32L! However, do not fret readers. Our spirits are lifted daily by executing suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) and maritime strike missions with the good men and women from Strike Fighter Weapons School Pacific. We are excited to be jumping into air-to-air SFARP this summer.

By the time you read this, we will have had a Change of Command. Outgoing Skipper CDR Adam "Gilligan" Bryan, leaving us to command the *Blue Angels* in 2025, will be succeeded by CDR Hall "Waffles" Graham. Additionally, we will have welcomed Prospective Executive Officer CDR Tony "Dirty" Kopp, and we will have bid farewell to two of our senior JOs. LT Joseph "Scooby Poo" Rauenhorst will attend TOPGUN this summer and LT Chet "Thurman Merman" Shutack will be suffering in paradise at NAS Key West with the VFC-111 *Sun Downers*.

In the near future, we are scheduled to participate in some weapons employment evolutions, including firing a Joint Standoff Weapon, Laser *Maverick* Air-To-Ground missile and Highspeed Anti-Radiation Missile. As for the rest of work ups, the

MC2 Justin McTaggart, USN



An F/A-18E Super Hornet assigned to the VFA-137 Kestrels roars off the catapult of USS Nimitz (CVN 68) during the squadron's most recent deployment on board the Navy's longest-serving carrier.

Page 72 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 73



time and location are unknown. As we get back into advanced training and further into the process, the *Kestrels* are getting all worked up just thinking about going on deployment in 2025!

VAQ-139 COUGARS

by LT Andrew "Skinny Leonard" Wisegarver, USN

Charging out of a Change of Command, the Cougars took multiple opportunities for outreach and promotion of the Naval Aviation Enterprise. Most notably was participation in a static display at JRB New Orleans, where Cougar aircrew captivated enthusiastic attendees and regaled visitors with tales of prior deployments and flights.

Returning to the majestic Pacific Northwest, VAQ-139 began preparations for the Commander, Naval Air Forces Aviation Maintenance Inspection (AMI). The maintenance department takes great pride in the meticulous nature of their daily operations and carried that forward into the evolution. Upon the inspection team's arrival, Sailors at all levels welcomed the feedback provided, implemented practices and increased material readiness. The *Cougars* passed with flying colors thanks to the outstanding commitment to excellence of the entire squadron.

After completing AMI, VAQ-139 proceeded on a det to Ellsworth AFB in support of Global Lightning as well as integration training with B-1B Lancers. This proved to be a fantastic opportunity for the Cougars to learn more about the formidable capabilities of the *Bone* and develop further relationships with our Air Force counterparts. The exercise ended as a great success and provided valuable feedback for U.S. Strategic Command.

Back at NAS Whidbey Island, VAQ-139 spared no time in continuing our superior performance. We are proud to celebrate LT Matt "Slap Chop" Tassinari on completing the Level IV syllabus and achieving SEAD Package Commander qualification. Additionally, LT Grant "Dirty Harry" Picker completed the Level III syllabus and achieved Growler Mission Commander qualification. Tactical qualifications like these will serve the Cougars well as we head into the Advanced Readiness Program, and through the rest of the year.

VAW-121 BLUETAILS

by LTJG Kevin Schwartz, USN

In the early months of 2024, the Bluetails successfully completed a highly productive maintenance phase, ensuring elite levels of readiness for the squadron's upcoming dets and deployment. Aircrew have maintained exceptional tactical proficiency through rigorous simulator events and proficiency flights held week after week. Thanks to the outstanding efforts of our maintenance team, the final aircraft upgrades are wrapping up, guaranteeing that we possess the most advanced command and control aircraft in the fleet.

The squadron's achievements have been duly recognized with prestigious awards, including the Blue "M" Award for medical readiness in Fiscal Year 2023 and the Association of Naval Aviation Tactical Aviation Award for innovation and excellence in air warfare for Calendar Year 2023. These accolades are a testament to the hard work and dedication of the men and women of the Bluetails.

In February, the squadron successfully conducted CQ on board USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), with 10 pilots requalifying for carrier operations. March saw the execution of the Maintenance Program Assist, providing valuable insights and lessons learned to prepare for the upcoming AMI later in the spring.

April marked the commencement of the work-up cycle with the Hawkeye Advance Readiness Program. Over a five-week period of lectures and simulator events, the Airborne Command & Control and Logistics Weapons School ensured that all *Bluetail* aircrew were equipped with advanced tactics for the forthcoming OFRP events, ensuring seamless integration with CVW-17 and Carrier Strike Group Eleven.

The squadron then geared up for the next major evolution — SFARP. In May, aircrew began intensive training alongside our CVW-17 VFA and VAQ counterparts in Lemoore in preparation for the upcoming deployment.

Later in the summer, the *Bluetails* will hold a change-of-command ceremony, bidding farewell to CDR Matthew "Toe" Campbell, who will pass the torch to CDR Brad "Broner" Weiland. Fair winds and following seas to CDR Campbell and his family. Under CDR Weiland's leadership, the Bluetails are poised to continue setting the standard for excellence across the fleet. The squadron eagerly anticipates a busy and successful remainder of the year, fully prepared to tackle the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

VAW-121



VAW-121 Bluetails aircrew pictured beneath the wing of one of the squadron's E-2D Advanced Hawkeyes.



VFA-86 SIDEWINDERS CONTINUE F-35C TRANSITION

by LT Jacob "GOATJAM" Troyer, USN

This spring, the VFA-86 *Sidewinders* crushed milestones during an arduous transition from the F/A-18E Super Hornet to the F-35C Lightning II. Seven months after the last Winder F/A-18E departed Lemoore for transfer to the VFA-81 Sunliners, the squadron marked a significant milestone with the acceptance of its first F-35C aircraft in April. Under the astute leadership of F-35 maintenance authority and unofficial mayor of the Lemoore flight line, MMCPO Rich Brickey, the VFA-86 maintenance department has been hard at work preparing

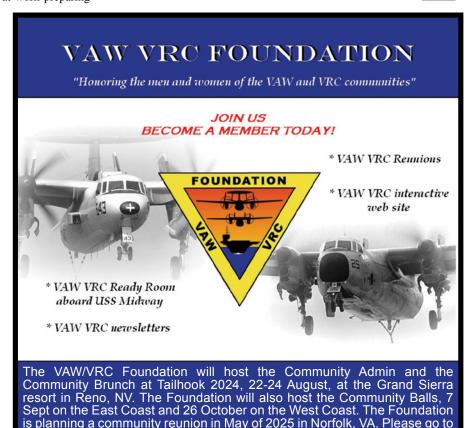
for the upcoming Conventional Weapons Technical Proficiency Inspection and Maintenance Program Assist in support of the squadron's Safe-for-Flight Certification. Sidewinder maintainers and pilots alike are excited to see light at the end of the transition tunnel and very much look forward to operating autonomously once again!

Despite lacking physical aircraft for several months during the transition, VFA-86 continued to set a strong tactical pace with multiple Winder pilots making strides in the newly revised *Lightning* Tactics and Weapons Syllabus (LTWS), borrowing jets when possible and conducting simulators both at home and at the Joint Simulation Environment at NAS Patuxent River, CDRs Nathan "Franken" Staples, Patrick "Judas" Lakusta, LCDRs Chris "PEOTE" Pagenkopf and Tommy "SNATCH" Petrilak battled through a collective 6,900 hours of fourth-generation baggage to complete LTWS Level III (Four-Ship Lead) qualifications. To assist them with this daunting task, the Winders were thankfully able to burn a couple of draft picks to select two experienced F-35 pilots to join the squadron prior to the transition, LCDRs James "TIP" Davis II and Bill "Mike Honcho" Goodwin. In addition, SNATCH had the notable distinction of being the first VFA-86 transition pilot to complete carrier qualification in advance of his departure from an illustrious training officer tour to join our fully equipped sister F-35C squadron, the VFA-97 Warhawks.

The Winders recently bid farewell to beloved JO leader and noted humanitarian LT Ross "Macbeth" Cano, who moved down the hall to join the VFA-125 Rough Raiders as a Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) instructor. The remaining members

of our rapidly dwindling in residence JOPA, LTs David "Dale" Cochrane, Dan "Dude B" Curry, Dan "Freddie" Fulton and Jake "GOATJAM" Troyer, are expeditiously progressing through the LTWS and FRS transition syllabi.

The Sidewinder team remains dedicated to our transition to the Navy's most capable beyond visual range air-to-air and suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) platform. In spite of Technology Refresh 3 delivery delays, the fleet can count on Winder pilots and maintainers to be ready for the next fight when diplomacy fails.



the Foundation Website, www.vaw-vrcreadyroom.org and the Community

Newsletter, the 1MC, for more information and to join the Foundation.

Page 74 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 75 William R. Lewis MC3 Isaiah B. Goessl, USN



VAQ-134 BEGINS YEAR WITH SMOOTH TRANSITION AND HIGH-INTENSITY TRAINING

by LT Aidan Uitvlucht, USN

In January 2024, VAQ-134 embarked on a thrilling journey (see Centurion Lounge and Delta Airlines Basic Economy Class) to Nellis AFB, Nev., to participate in *Red Flag Nellis*. The *Garudas*, led by CDR Chad "Recall" Walker, were ready to showcase our capabilities in one of the world's most challenging training environments.

Red Flag Nellis is renowned for its rigorous and realistic combat training that single services just aren't able to replicate on their own. For the members of VAQ-134, this exercise presented an unparalleled opportunity to test our skills and strategies in a dynamic, multi-domain battlespace. As the sun set over the vast Nevada desert, the squadron's pilots and electronic warfare officers prepared for the grueling challenges ahead with unwavering determination and focus.

Throughout the exercise, every night 120 to 180 aircraft took to the skies, executing a variety of complex missions, planned until 0600 the night and early morning before. The primary focus was on precision strikes and electronic jamming, essential components of modern warfare that disrupt enemy communications and radar systems, as well as key facets of the EA-18G *Growler* and F-35 *Lightning II*.

One of the key highlights of *Red Flag Nellis* was the simulation of high threat environments. VAQ-134's *Growlers* faced adversary threats, including sophisticated surface-to-air missiles and enemy aircraft. These scenarios pushed the squadron to its limits, testing tactics and techniques against some of the most formidable threats imaginable. Despite the intense pressure, the *Garudas* consistently demonstrated our mastery of the electromagnetic spectrum, effectively neutralizing enemy defenses and paving the way for allied forces.

VAQ-134 also excelled in SEAD missions on the expansive Nellis range, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles to deliver packages. These operations involved identifying and neutralizing enemy radar and missile sites, ensuring the safety of allied aircraft. The squadron's *Growlers* employed a combination of electronic warfare and precision munitions to achieve their objectives, demonstrating proficiency in both offensive and defensive operations.

CDR Walker's leadership was instrumental in guiding VAQ-134 through the challenges of *Red Flag Nellis*. His strategic vision and commitment to excellence inspired the squadron to push beyond its limits and achieve new heights of performance. The experience gained from this exercise was invaluable, providing VAQ-134 with a wealth of knowledge and expertise that enhanced our operational readiness for future missions, despite CDR Walker stepping down as CO just a few short weeks later.

February 2024 was a month of poignant reflection and forward momentum for VAQ-134. The squadron gathered at NAS Whidbey Island to honor CDR Walker's tenure and welcome CDR Jason "Merman" Sakash as the new commanding officer. CDR Walker will assume command of the Navy's Electronic Attack Weapons School (HAVOC) at NAS Fallon. CDR Sakash takes the helm at VAQ-134 after his tenure as

executive officer and over 30 years serving in the U.S. Navy. He enlisted in 1993 and until 2006 was a SAR aircrewman and rescue swimmer in the UH-46 Sea Knight and later the UH-3 Sea King. After commissioning in 2006, he selected the EA-6B Prowler out of flight training and deployed with the VAQ-137 Rooks on board USS Enterprise (CVN 65), flying numerous combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. He then transferred to CAG-2 as the air wing electronic warfare officer and deployed on board USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). Following this tour he deployed with the VAQ-142 Gray Wolves on board USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) as a department head. After serving as the training officer at the VAQ FRS, he joined VAQ-134 as executive officer.

The change-of-command ceremony was a testament to the enduring traditions of Naval Aviation. CDR Walker delivered a heartfelt farewell address. He expressed deep gratitude to the men and women of VAQ-134 for their dedication and hard work during his tenure. His words were a poignant reminder of the bonds forged through shared challenges, failures and triumphs.

CDR Sakash, the seasoned aviator, stepped forward to assume command. In his inaugural address, he pledged to uphold the proud legacy of VAQ-134 and lead the squadron to new heights of excellence. The ceremony concluded with a firm handshake and salute, symbolizing the seamless transition of leadership. With CDR Walker's legacy as a guiding light, CDR Sakash was ready to chart a bold course for the future.

Just a month after the Change of Command, VAQ-134's warriors found themselves on the sun-drenched shores of Key West for a completely different kind of challenge. The *Garudas* focused on the high-paced flights of basic fighter maneuvering (BFM). This training was crucial for honing the squadron's air-to-air combat skills, a vital component of operational readiness. Amidst the backdrop of turquoise waters and swaying palm trees, VAQ-134 aircrew engaged in rigorous and adrenaline-pumping aerial combat exercises. Under the watchful eyes of seasoned instructors, the aviators tested their mettle in close quarters combat scenarios, where split-second decisions and flawless execution are paramount.

The BFM training sessions pushed the pilots and their aircraft to the limits. High-*g* turns, rapid accelerations and sudden maneuvers were the order of the day as each pilot strove to gain the upper hand in simulated dogfights. The intensity of the training was matched only by the determination of VAQ-134's aviators, who showcased their proficiency and adaptability in every engagement. The versatility of the EA-18G aircraft, coupled with the pilots' rigorous training, demonstrated the squadron's ability to excel in diverse operational environments. The experiences gained from the Key West exercises significantly enhanced our combat readiness and tactical prowess.

In the annals of Naval Aviation, the early months of 2024 will be remembered as a time of transition and triumph for the *Garudas*. With our steadfast commitment to excellence and unyielding spirit, we continue to uphold the highest standards of Naval Aviation, ready to defend the skies and dominate the electromagnetic spectrum.



VRM-30 BACK IN THE SADDLE

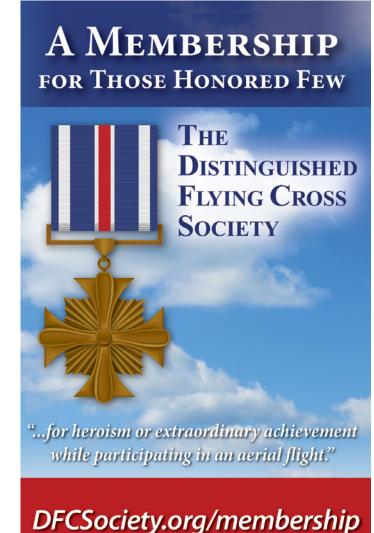
by LT Aidan Uitvlucht, USN

During the safety-driven pause on operations this year, VRM-30 has scrutinized our maintenance and safety processes, finding new ways to refine them and further increase squadron efficiency and effectiveness. The *Titan* maintenance department was hard at work, meticulously priming our 18 CMV-22Bs for their return to mission and prepping for the acceptance of three new aircraft to our fleet in the coming months. VRM-30 was also busy with the move into our newly built hangar. The facility houses both the *Titans* and VRM-50 *Sunhawks*, the community's FRS, which is now responsible for the training of all incoming CMV-22B pilots, aircrewmen and maintainers. Designed and constructed specifically for the VRM community, this state-of-the-art hangar will continue to be a valuable asset to the new generation of Navy logistics for decades to come.

As the entire V-22 *Osprey* community comes out of a four-month suspension on flights, VRM-30 has been rebuilding readiness with a strong commitment to safety. We kicked off the 2024 spring season with a return-to-flight plan that prioritized that commitment while quickly restoring flight crews' proficiency. After the "back in the saddle" period that reinstated pilot and aircrewmen currency, we continued to grow operational momentum by supporting the *Leap Frogs*, the Navy Parachute Team, in their military free-fall training over the beaches of San Diego. We are also planning and coordinating with external entities underway to conduct training to include LHD/LHA deck landing qualifications and aerial refueling in the near future. These evolutions enable us to maintain our readiness and continue the drive toward deployment with and support of CVWs. Flight crew proficiency increases with every flight hour of training and the squadron exercises maintenance procedures, adding to the community's breadth and depth of knowledge necessary to complete the VRM mission.

Now the squadron can redirect our focus back toward large-scale exercises and deployments. This summer, we will support *Carl Vinson* during *Rim of the Pacific*, handling logistics for CVW-2 in and around the Hawaiian Islands. Later in the year, the *Titans* are slated to support CVW-2 again during its Western Pacific deployment.

Reinitializing and evaluating maintenance and operational processes has given the squadron valuable insight on how to return to fully supporting Pacific CVWs in even more efficient and effective ways than before. The entire VRM community retains our strong commitment to being the best in the world when it comes to accomplishing the naval logistics mission. With every day of our enthusiastic work to this end, the VRM-30 *Titans* continue to lead the evolution of carrier on board delivery.



Page 76 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 77







SEAHUNTER UPDATE -MH-60Rs ARRIVE AT NAWDC

The first of four MH-60R Seahawks arrived on 26 January 2024, delivered by CDR "Jean Luc" Richard, LT "Tin Man" Canclini and AWRCM Nick Hunter. After a three-year effort involving Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, N98 and the Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center (NAWDC) staff, all of the CVW's aircraft are represented on the NAWDC flight line. The arrival of the MH-60R within the first year of standing up the MH-60R Weapons School, SEAHUNTER, will go a long way to improving instructor staff tactical proficiency and open opportunities for advanced tactical development and experimentation.

With the SEAHUNTER staff growing from six to 10 lieutenant instructors, the addition of four MH-60Rs at NAWDC doubles down on the HSM warfighting development at NAS Fallon. This decision also aligns with the Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Weapons School mission to increase the lethality throughout the Joint Force, highlighted in the semiannual *Resolute Hunter*. This is the Navy's only Joint and Coalition all-domain kill web development exercise that increases the interoperability and lethality required to build warfighters that can dominate the decision space of the 21st century fight.

If you are looking to lead, train and fly at the tactical edge, NAWDC leads Naval Aviation, and now with the MH-60R on board.



ATTENTION SQUADRON COs and PAOs

The editors of *The Hook* encourage you to share and celebrate your squadron activities, accomplishments and milestones by contributing In Marshal articles quarterly. In addition to written accounts, we are looking for outstanding, unpublished and recent high-resolution photos of squadron activities, personnel and aircraft. The better the quality of photo and article, the better you look. If you want a shot at the coveted cover photo, the image you send must be very high resolution and portrait (vertical) format. Please do not embed images in your article.

For Changes of Command, please submit the names of the new and relieved COs, a high-resolution command photo of the new CO, the date, location and full name of the command.

The Hook Submissions should be sent to:

Email: thookmagazine@gmail.com Editor, The Hook 9696 Businesspark Ave.

San Diego, CA 92131-1643

In Marshal Deadlines:

• Spring _ 1 February 1 May • Summer 1 August Winter 1 November

If you have any questions or need advice on content, send the editors an email. We want to help your command look good and are ready to assist.

The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 79 Page 78







WAVEOFFS & BOLTERS

LET US HEAR YOUR STORIES

JOIN NOW

The mission of the Intruder Association is to preserve and promote the legacy of the US Navy and Marine Corps A-6 Intruder Community, to keep others informed of the A-6 aircraft mission and accomplishments and to provide for continued camaraderie among all those who flew and supported the aircraft and its squadrons, thus "Preserving the Legend of the Intruder."

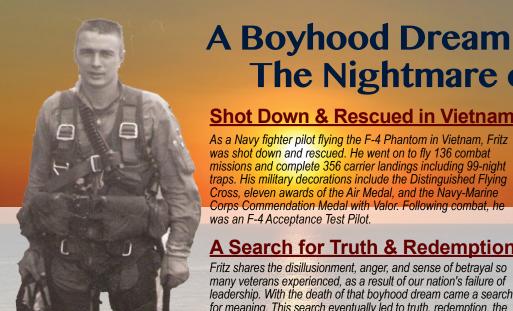
You are welcomed to join the over 1,200 active members of the Intruder Association. Our membership is made up of former Pilots, Bombardier/Navigators, Maintainers, and Technical Representatives. Others may join as Associate Members. Your membership package will include welcome letter, patch, decal, and the biannual Windscreen magazine.

Our aircraft may no longer be flying, but the memories of missions flown and liberty lived will live on.



Direct Access to Membership Registration Online Form: (QR CODE)

All Weather Attack www.intruderassociation.org



The author William "Fritz" Klumpp

Buy this book

today!

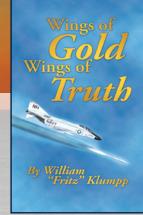
The Nightmare of Combat

Shot Down & Rescued in Vietnam

As a Navy fighter pilot flying the F-4 Phantom in Vietnam, Fritz was shot down and rescued. He went on to fly 136 combat missions and complete 356 carrier landings including 99-night traps. His military decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, eleven awards of the Air Medal, and the Navy-Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Valor. Following combat, h was an F-4 Acceptance Test Pilot.



Fritz shares the disillusionment, anger, and sense of betrayal so many veterans experienced, as a result of our nation's failure of leadership. With the death of that boyhood dream came a search for meaning. This search eventually led to truth, redemption, the discovery of purpose in this life, and hope for the life to come.



Find how you too can experience that same life change.

Available at **amazon** and bookstores

What is It?

he spring issue's mystery plane was a much more difficult selection than usual. This is partly because it was a concept design only. No finished airplane ever even remotely addressed all the Navy's optimistic expectations, but the Lockheed S-3 Viking came the closest.

I had one clear winner this time. Manny Gutsche from San Diego commented, "this was harder than most. The initial view appears cartoonish. What is it? ... [It is] the Rockwell International Model 430 Type A V/STOL [vertical/short takeoff and landing] concept aircraft.



Rockwell International Model 430 Type A V/STOL concept aircraft.

"To address expected tactical aircraft needs 20 to 30 years in the future, the Chief of Naval Operations Sea-Based Air Master Study Plan issued in 1977 identified transitioning sea-based aircraft to V/STOL by 1999–2000. The Navy plan envisioned three types of aircraft. Type A was subsonic, Type B was supersonic, and Type C was to be determined later. V/STOL A was to fulfill airborne early warning, anti-submarine warfare, carrier onboard delivery, tanker, Marine assault, anti-ship surveillance and targeting missions. Type A was projected for Initial Operational Capacity between 1987 and 1992. Several contractors submitted concept designs. Thanks for the NAVAIR adventure!"

The summer mystery bird should be a little bit easier, and I expect plenty of confident responses.

Please keep your informative cards, letters and emails coming (Tailhook Association, 9696 Business Park Ave., San Diego, CA 92131-1643; thookmagazine@gmail.com). Please, no phone calls.





What is It?

THE LAST CUT

CDR James W. Carroll, USN(Ret), Life RADM Robert P. Caudill, USN(Ret), Life Mr. James Corley CDR Francis "Frank" Dobbertein, USN(Ret), Life LT Andrian Kremm (USN Veteran), Life CDR Charles A. Peterson, USN(Ret) LCDR John D. Robinson, USN(Ret) LT Bob Rvan (USN Veteran) Mr. Donald C, Sherman, Life CAPT Clinton L. Smith, USN(Ret), Life Mr. William E. Steinwedell (USN Veteran) AO3 Bobby Wayne Thomas (USN Veteran), Life Mr. Carl Palmer

ADVERTISERS, The Hook

Summer 2024		
Association of Naval Aviation:		
AV8RSTUFF.com		
A4 Skyhawk Association82		
A7 Corsair II Association		
Karen Black (author)		
LCDR "Engine Eddie" Davidson (author)		
The Distinguished Flying Cross Society		
ForeFeathers Enterprises		
Friends of Naval Aviation, OK3 Pensacola		
Full Sail Fine Art		
F-14 Tomcat Association83		
James Geer (author)		
General Atomic Electromagnetics Inside Front Cover		
Grand Sierra Resort		
Intruder Association Membership80		
JT4, LLC		
William "Fritz" Klumpp (author)		
Marine Patches		
Navy Mutual Aid Association		
Neyenesch Printers		
Omega Airial Refueling Services		
S-3 Viking Assocation		
Tactical Air Support		
Textron Aviation Defense, LLCOutside Back Cover		
The Tailhook Association		
Top Hook Realty		
VAW/VRC Foundation		
LCDR James A. White III. MD USN(Ret) (author)		

remarkable quality and service

Page 81

The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024 Page 80

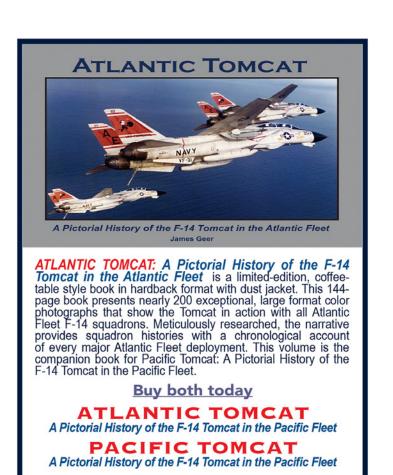
RESPOT

Letter to the Editor

In the Spring 2024 issue of *The Hook*, a photo on page 17 with a F7U-3 *Cutlass* is identified as the VF-124 *Gunfighters*. This is incorrect. This aircraft operated with the VF-124 *Stingarees* on board USS *Hancock* (CVA 19) during the Far East cruise in 1955–'56. CDR James S. "Bud" Brown, then CO of VF-124, was my uncle. The patch belonged to squadron pilot LT Robert Angel.

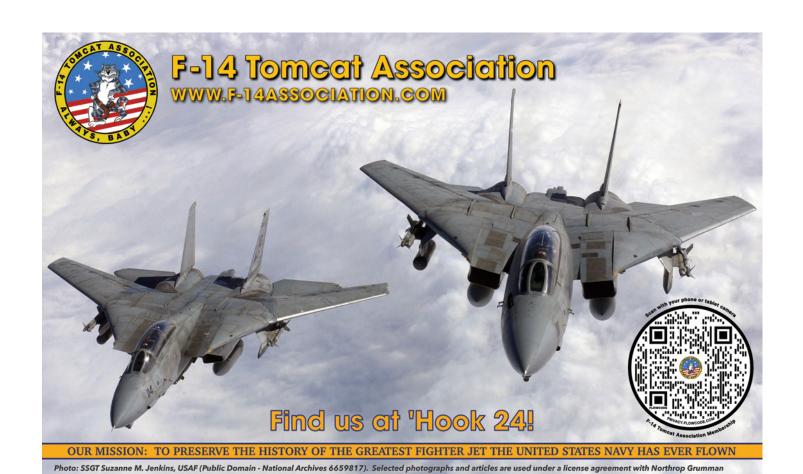
— Steve Wells





Available at Amazon.com
Contact scramble4productions@gmail.com
www.scramble4productions.com



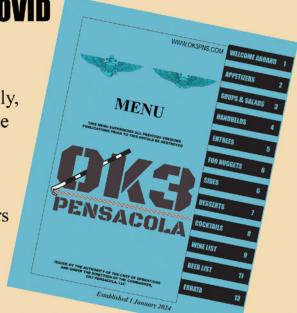


A concept so strong that neither COVID nor cancer could keep it down!

Slated to open in 2025, OK3 will be a family-friendly, full-service restaurant and bar that pays tribute to the rich history of Naval Aviation.

We will once again host our annual meeting during Hook. This meeting is open to both existing investors as well as those interested in participating.

RSVPs are required. We hope you will join us!



Page 83

ANNUAL INVESTOR'S MEETING

THURSDAY, AUGUST 22, 2024 - 1800 GRAND SIERRA RESORT - SPARKS, NV

RSVP - FRIENDSOFNAVAIR@GMAIL.COM

Page 82 The Hook, Summer 2024 The Hook, Summer 2024



ON DECK

An Aircrewman's View of the Battle of the Philippine Sea

by Hill Goodspeed

his summer marks the 80th anniversary of one of the great carrier battles of World War II, which included an action called the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" and a long-range strike against the Japanese fleet accurately described in the title of a book by LCDR J. Bryan — Mission Beyond Darkness. Among those that launched into uncertainty in the latter was Pittsburgh native ARM2c John Conrad Bramer Jr., flying in the rear cockpit of a VB-14 SB2C Helldiver off USS Wasp (CV 18). He almost had not made it into the Navy, the recruiters turning him down a half dozen times because he was too short and underweight. Finally accepted into the service, he was among the many who defied regulations to keep a diary, his writings and those of his fellow veterans providing valuable personal insights that inform the story of the war.

"All of us during the week of the twentieth of June 1944 were rather expectantly awaiting the moment when the Japanese Fleet would come within striking range of our forces, for after all, it would be a wonderful opportunity." With these words, Bramer began his account, capturing the eagerness of aircrew to strike Japanese carriers the day after combat air patrols knocked down scores of enemy attackers over the ships of Task Force 58 supporting the invasion of the Mariana Islands. The decision to launch came late in the day on 20 June, with U.S. Navy aircraft flying at extended ranges their pilots and aircrewmen knew would tax their fuel reserves and necessitate night recoveries upon return to their carriers. Bramer recalled launching around 1630 and arriving over enemy forces around 1800.

"Then the fireworks started. More anti-aircraft fire came up at us from the ships below than I ever had the misfortune to dodge up until that time," Bramer wrote, noting his pilot, LTJG Albert Walraven of Dallas, Tex., picked out an oiler to attack, scoring a near miss. "The 'ack-ack' followed us for quite a while and when it stopped, I thought my worries were over ... In reality our troubles were only beginning." Japanese fighters executed several slow rolls and made their attacks on a three-plane formation that included Bremer's SB2C. "I started firing [at one of the attacking aircraft] and just when he was getting too close for comfort, two beautiful *Hellcats* dove on him and chased him off." Then a second enemy fighter attacked. "This time there were no guardian angels ... so I had to trust to luck and to my thirty calibers. After his run he broke away and another followed him in. This one was shot down by an F6F who had returned from chasing the first one."

Though the sky was now clear of enemy fighters, defensive maneuvers had burned precious fuel and Walraven announced they would probably have to ditch. Around 2105 their SB2C left the comfort of being in formation with other U.S. aircraft and descended toward the vast Pacific. "It was pitch dark, so Mr. Walraven had to land entirely by instruments and a beautiful landing it was." However, the impact of hitting the water caused Bremer's head to hit some equipment in his cockpit, breaking his nose.

Both men scrambled into their life raft in the darkness and sunrise came earlier than expected. It brought the sound of an aircraft engine and, after determining it was not an enemy aircraft, Walraven and Bramer spread their dye marker and fired off signal flares. The pilot of the TBF *Avenger* responded by dipping his wing and descending to a lower altitude. Circling the raft, he dropped a smoke light and dye marker and then flew away. A few hours later two more aircraft appeared. "As they came closer, one peeled off as if coming in for a strafing run ... so we dove into the water. As the first plane came into close range, I saw that it was an F6F *Hellcat*, so we climbed back aboard our raft and waved at him."

For a time, this pair of aircraft and then another pair circled overhead, the latter briefly disappearing and leaving the two men alone. "About twenty minutes later we saw the fighters on the horizon maneuvering as though they were trying to guide something to us." That something was USS Seawolf (SS 197), which pulled the downed aircrew from the water and took them aboard. Over the course of the ensuing days, Walraven and Bramer experienced life as submariners from crash dives in response to enemy aircraft overhead to silent running. A Fourth of July celebration introduced them to the submarine service's famous chow as they enjoyed "turkey, ham, mashed potatoes, ice cream and many other delicacies. Last but not least all hands were given a ration of brandy." Eventually, Seawolf tied up next to a submarine tender. The airmen received word they were getting off the boat after three weeks on board, and "as sort of a farewell gesture we caught twenty-seven fish and took them to the galley and had a wonderful feast of fried fish.

Walraven and Bramer were soon back aboard *Wasp* flying combat missions. after "two weeks of traveling by boat, car, jeep, ship, and airplanes." For their actions on 20 June, they received the Navy Cross and Distinguished Flying Cross, respectively. Sadly, *Seawolf* went down on 3 October 1944, off Morotai with the loss of all hands, probably the result of friendly fire after an attack by USS *Richard M. Rowell* (DE 403), the crew believing they had found a submerged Japanese submarine.

National Naval Aviation Museum



Cover of the diary kept by ARM2c John Conrad Bramer Jr. in which he penned his experiences in the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

Page 84 The Hook, Summer 2024

5-3 VIKING SQUADRONS THROUGH THE YEARS

The S-3 *Viking* was a four-crew, twin-engine, turbofan-powered jet designed and produced by the Lockheed Corporation. Because of its characteristic sound, aircrew and maintainers nicknamed it the "War Hoover" after the vacuum cleaner brand. Entering regular service in 1974, the *Viking* proved to be a reliable platform and operated in many roles beyond the originally intended antisubmarine warfare mission. By the time the last Navy S-3 retired from service in 2016, the type had equipped no fewer than 18 squadrons, some of whose patches appear below.



VS-21 Redtails 1975–2005



VS-27 Grim Watchdogs 1987–1994



VS-22 Checkmates 1976–2009



VS-28 Gamblers 1976–1992



VS-24 Scouts 1977-2007



VS-29 Dragonfires 1976–2004



VS-30 Diamondcutters 1977–2007



VS-31 Topcats 1977–2008



VS-33 *Screwbirds* 1977–2006



VS-35 Blue Wolves 1991–2005



VS-38 Red Griffins 1978–2004



VS-41 Shamrocks 1974–2006

TEXTRON AVIATION DEFENSE

in collaboration with **LEONARDO**

THE WORLD'S PREMIERE NAVAL AVIATION TRAINERS

PAST. PRESENT. FUTURE.



©2024 Textron Aviation Defense LLC. The sale, export, and re-export of Textron Aviation Defense and Special Mission Aircraft, as well as the associated maintenance support, and unique technical data may require US Government export license approval under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR: Title 22 C.F.R. Parts 120-130) and/or the U.S. Export Administration Regulations (EAR: Title 15 C.F.R. Parts 730 - 774).