Rotor Review

Spring 2025
Number 168

First Off Deck

In This Issue:

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The annual Fleet Fly-In joins instructors, who previously trained at NAS Whiting Field, with current flight students to provide knowledge and help them prepare for the career decision of selecting their Fleet aircraft platform. The Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In brings both Industry to Whiting and Fleet aircraft to let the students have firsthand information about the platforms. The Rotary Wing and Tilt Rotor Community send seasoned pilots and aircrewmen to the event who provide insight into not just the aircraft with FAM flights but deployments, bases, and life after Whiting.

"This gives them a chance to see what their Fleet aircraft do and have a little bit more experience depending on what their preference is with that hands-on look," said LT Adam Grant, a helicopter training instructor with HT-8 at NAS Whiting Field. "All of the instructors here are from the Fleet, so they bring that knowledge."

All Navy, Marine Corps. and Coast Guard helicopter pilots go through basic flight school at Whiting Field, and then each student applies for and is ultimately assigned to more advanced training for a specific type of aircraft. The type of helicopter a pilot is trained to fly determines his or her Fleet aircraft platform affiliation.

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MH-60S Seahawk helicopters assigned to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9 and MH-60R Seahawk helicopters assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 70 take off from the flight deck. U.S. Navy Photo.

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Rotor Review supports the goals of the association, provides a forum for discussion and exchange of information on topics of interest to the Rotary Force, and keeps membership informed of NHA activities. As necessary, the President of NHA will provide guidance to the Rotor Review Editorial Board to ensure Rotor Review content continues to support this statement of policy as the Naval Helicopter Association adjusts to the expanding and evolving Rotary Wing and Tilt Rotor Communities.

FOCUS: First Off Deck

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First Off the Deck: The Pivotal Role of Helicopters in Naval Strike Operations

By RADM Dan "Dano" Fillion, USN (Ret.)

In today's Naval Aviation Enterprise, the phrase "First Off the Deck" is more than just a figure of speech—it's the reality of modern Carrier Strike Group operations. In an era of integrated, multi-platform warfare, the first go/no-go criteria for a strike package often hinges on whether the helicopters can launch. From anti-submarine warfare and surface strike coordination to personnel recovery and logistics, the helo community has become the indispensable first mover, shaping the battlespace before fast movers and strike aircraft even get airborne. The ability of helicopters to operate in contested environments, establish early battlespace awareness, and provide critical enablers makes them the true pacesetters of modern naval air power.

Fittingly, this theme of firsts extends beyond the flight deck and into Naval Aviation history, as recently recognized at Naval Air Station North Island in Coronado, California. The front gate now proudly displays an MH-60F, Seahawk mounted on a pedestal, commemorating a legendary first—the only helicopter pilot ever awarded the Medal of Honor, LT Clyde Lassen. During the Vietnam War, then-LT Lassen, flying a UH-2A Seasprite, braved enemy fire on a daring night rescue mission to save downed aviators, demonstrating unparalleled courage and skill. His actions set a precedent for generations of Naval helicopter pilots, embodying the ethos of selfless service and unwavering commitment to the mission.

Although the NHA Symposium 2025 was canceled, I still stand by the fact that First Off the Deck is not just a theme—it's a call to recognize the critical role helicopter crews play in the success of every mission. From the historic bravery of Clyde Lassen to the modern-day crews ensuring strike packages are launched effectively, our community continues to lead from the front. Whether it's opening the battlespace, executing the first critical mission elements, or setting the standard for aviation excellence, Naval helicopters remain the vanguard of maritime air power.

VR and CNJI (Committed Not Just Involved),
Dano

First Off Deck

By CDR Scott "Ace" Lippincott, USN

Fellow NHA Members,

I'm back! In a bit of a non-standard move, I've gladly accepted an offer to temporarily fill in as the NHA National President until a permanent relief is in place. Since my early days with NHA as a JO, serving as Rotor Review Editor-in-Chief, to my time in the seat as the Region One President, and now serving as your National President, it is clear that I value this organization tremendously. Not in a self-serving capacity, but rather in that I want to serve each and every one of YOU to ensure this is the organization YOU want it to be. NHA continues to grow and serve the rotary/tilt community both Active and Retired in more ways than I can possibly capture here in a column. With JO leadership like Brendon "BradChad" McGinnis and Brendon "McP" Lee, AW leadership like AWRC Pugliese and AWR1 Galindo, and our new(ish) Marketing Director Megan Buriak, NHA has rapidly evolved into a modern organization that best serves the needs of the NHA community and truly captures the value to each of our Regular & Lifetime Members. This truly is an organization "by the people, for the people".

I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize the incredible sacrifice of our outgoing National President, CAPT Tim "Buck" Rogers. Running an FRS is a tremendous feat in and of itself, let alone the heavy lift he put into NHA, and for building a foundation for the 2025 NHA Symposium planning effort. Thank you Buck, for your leadership and countless hours you have put into this organization and ensuring its success. (Editorial: Buck and I go all the way back 20 years to when we were in API together. He has always been a great friend and mentor.) Buck…best of luck to you Linda and the family, as you head back to sea as the soon-to-be XO/CO of USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7)!

Ok…looking forward. I had originally drafted a detailed column on how awesome NHA Symposium 2025 was about to be. By now, you've all heard that we reluctantly had to cancel Symposium this year due to DoD-wide budget shortfalls and travel restrictions. As I alluded to in my email blast to members earlier…this decision was not taken lightly. In fact, we spent countless hours and days working through the math trying to find a way to yes. But in the end, it wasn't fiscally possible and unfortunately our plans had to change for this year. But rest assured, your NHA National Team has not marked this as a loss! We picked ourselves right up and marched into the office the following week to start working on a new regional event schedule.

Plans are rapidly rolling out and we are working hard on events like Regional Roundups, a worldwide Aircrew Challenge, National and Regional Award Ceremonies, and other events that will continue to grow the organization and build comradery. Most important to me is that we offer opportunities to ALL regions to make this a great year! So, while it looks a little different than in past years, I promise you we have plans in store that will continue to provide real tangible value. As I've said repeatedly… this is an organization FOR YOU. Keep the ideas flowing in through your Regional Presidents and we will take action!

A final editorial note that will likely only be noticed by a small handful of folks. If you are reading this right now, you are doing so 100% electronically. In an effort to direct more of NHA funding to its Members, we have elected to forgo hard copy printing of Rotor Review. We made this decision after looking at the data. More than 80% of NHA Members elect to receive Rotor Review electronically only. The significant cost of going to print just isn't in line with what our Members want and how they get their media. So eRotor Review is here! Not only does it save money, it affords us better opportunities to create interactive experiences, ensure content is timely and relevant, and reach a wider audience. It's a small but significant change to return value back to NHA Members.

Again, thanks to the Commodores and NHA Leadership for entrusting me with NHA perhaps one last time. To the NHA Community at-large…please reach out if there is anything I can do to serve you better and make this feel more like home. Cheers and see you all at the IBar soon!

Stay Classy Helo/Tilt Bubbas!

V/r,
Ace

First Off Deck: The Backbone of Naval Readiness

By LCDR Brendan "BradChad" McGinnis, USN

LCDR Brendan "BradChad" McGinnis with CDR Marcus "Yeti" Hoogewind at the HSC-23 Change of Command ceremony.

In Naval Aviation, being "first off deck" is more than a routine—it's a mission requirement. Helicopter and vertical-lift platforms form the foundation of the Navy's operational readiness, ensuring the Fleet's success across a wide spectrum of missions. Whether delivering critical supplies, recovering personnel, hunting submarines, or engaging surface threats, our aircraft are the first to launch and the last to recover, making Rotary Wing aviation an indispensable part of mission execution.

Rotary Wing crews are built to adapt and overcome, meeting challenges head-on to ensure the mission gets done. From logistics and search-and-rescue to maritime strike and anti-submarine warfare, we operate in dynamic environments where flexibility and precision are paramount. The ability to operate from ships, austere locations, and contested environments makes us an essential force multiplier across the fleet.

Beyond operations, strengthening our professional community is just as important. In my role as NHA Vice President of Membership, I've prioritized enhancing value for our pilots, aircrew, and maintainers while making our events more accessible and rewarding.

While this year's NHA Symposium was ultimately canceled, the planning and structure built into it reflect the direction we're headed—toward greater value, broader participation, and a smoother member experience. The foundation laid this year will carry forward into future events, which are designed to be professional development opportunities packed with perks:

- Lower fees, more perks: Future registrations will be more affordable while still offering expanded benefits.
- Swag package for every attendee: Planned packages include a t-shirt, patch, sticker, koozie, tote bag, and drink tickets.
- Membership included: Symposium registration will include a one-year membership for non-members at no additional cost.
- Lifetime members attend free: Lifetime Members will continue to enjoy complimentary registration as a thank-you for their commitment.
- Improved registration process: We've revamped our system to allow attendees to easily manage and update their registration—no more phone calls to add events or change selections.

These member-first initiatives ensure NHA remains focused on professional growth, connection, and long-term value. By continuing to invest in our Rotary Wing community, we strengthen our presence across the Fleet and reinforce the vital role we play in the Navy's success.

Whether launching first off the deck or leading efforts to support our professional network, one thing remains clear: rotary-wing aviation brings capability, adaptability, and professionalism to every mission. That's who we are—and that's why we fly.

Fly Navy and Never Fold!

LCDR Brendan "BradChad" McGinnis
NHA VP of Membership
724.809.6548
Brendan.s.mcginnis.mil@us.navy.mil

The NHA National Team has locked in the Island Club on NASNI for Friday, 16 May for a Helo and Tilt Rotor Force Round Up for active-duty personnel (membership not required) and retired NHA Members. It is a blend of professional development activities, networking and camaraderie, and time together as pilots and aircrewmen.

For the schedule of events click **here**

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JO President's Report

First Off Deck

By LT Brendon "McP" Lee, USN

Back in August when we were brainstorming ideas for the theme of the 2025 NHA Symposium, we wanted a strong message that encapsulates what separates the rotary community from the rest of the Carrier Air Wing.

Although this year's Symposium has been canceled, I still want us all to take a minute to think about our role as a rotary force and the impact we have in the CVW. The entire air wing complements each other with our capabilities and limitations. Often, we (the rotary force), are stuck on one side of the kill-chain due to weapon engagement zone (WEZ) penetration, acceptable level of risk (ALR), or weapon delivery envelopes. We rely heavily on the VFA/VAQ/VAW assets to take care of the areas where we cannot fulfill, and the VFA/VAQ/VAW assets rely heavily on us for the areas they cannot fulfill. This machine of naval warfare only functions at full force when all assets can do their job 4.0.

So how do we pinpoint the appropriate topic of discussion in this quarter's issue of Rotor Review if everyone plays a major role in the fight? We take a minute to talk about ourselves; we talk about the importance of the rotary community providing CVN SAR/CSAR assets, SUW targeting solutions, and organic anti- submarine warfare capabilities. Furthermore, we reflect on the roles we have played over the past year in the Red Sea, and we discuss the rotary community's role in the future fight. We talk about why we are so necessary. "First Off Deck" does just that.

The first launch in the CVN flight plan cycle is always a SAR-capable rotary-wing asset to enable the other assets to go airborne, relying on us in case of an ejection or crash. The first aircraft off deck sets the standard for the rest of the cycle. If we fall out, their mission falls out. If the MH-60R can't get airborne, they can't perform the Long Range Maritime Strike (LRMS) mission. If the Osprey can't get airborne, other assets can't get the personnel and supplies they need. If the MH-60S can't get airborne, they lose their CSAR asset and can't do their mission. We have shifted from an auxiliary support role to an absolute minimum-GO criteria.

The NHA Team shares the same frustration and disappointment with you that we are not able to meet in-person this year to have these conversations and share our stories.

I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you who has volunteered your time this year to NHA. From the NALO coordination in Jax/Norfolk/Pensacola, to the heroes who volunteered to be on our panels, to the boots on the ground who volunteered to be running the Symposium – all of you stepped-up to the plate to try to make this year's Symposium happen. Thank you all.

Despite not being able to get the entire NHA world together this year at the same place at the same time, I still encourage all NHA regions' leadership to coordinate events that bring us together and provide an opportunity to tell our stories, because you—the member—are the reason NHA exists. Region 1 San Diego Team is already planning COA-2 Golf and Pickleball Tournaments, as well as joint Flight Suit Socials and Soft Patch Ceremonies that were supposed to happen at Symposium. Please monitor the NHA Website and social media accounts for Region events throughout the year.

As always, please reach out to me if you have any ideas for how we can make NHA more valuable to you—the member.

Let's party.

V/r,
McP

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Executive Director's View

Canceling Symposium & Pivoting…

By CAPT Jim Gillcrist, USN (Ret.)

Canceling the 2025 NHA Symposium with a theme of "First Off Deck" proved to be a tough decision. The fiscal environment within DoN, to include a drastic cut in TDY support for our event and mission essential only travel for active-duty personnel, created circumstances that made Symposium not financially viable. With the loss of revenue from Symposium, we are pivoting to lower operating cost by transitioning Rotor Review Magazine back to digital only and by pausing and restructuring the Region Stipend Program. We are also looking at how we can conduct regional events that deliver more camaraderie and equity across all the regions, how we can make Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In bigger and better, and how we reorganize for the 2026 Symposium and beyond given the current restrictions. I will say that the NHA National Team has been busy since last Symposium, taking action on candid feedback from members and industry to deliver more value. This remains our top goal. Lastly, we are indebted to our huge Volunteer Team who leaned in with their time and talent in so many ways to make this Symposium relevant and special, thank you.

As an update, Brendan "McP" Lee (National J.O. President), Brendon McGinnis (V.P. for Membership), and Megan "Megatron" Buriak (Director of Marketing) continue to play a vital role in creating more value through the ongoing initiatives:

- Technical refresh of association management system, event registration platform, payment processing, and website – making it simpler and more mobile friendly.
- Pricing restructure for individual and lifetime membership.
- Pricing restructure for corporate membership to include lead retrieval.
- Launch of more engaging social media presence.
- Creating more engagement across all Regions.

Please keep your membership profile up to date (mailing address and region affiliation). If you should need any assistance at all, give us a call at (619) 435-7139 and we will be happy to help – you will get Megan, Allyson, or myself.

Warm regards with high hopes, Jim Gillcrist.

"Every Member Counts / Stronger Together"

Newly "Coined" Lifetime Members (LTM) in the Spotlight

AWR2 Jacob Louderback, USN
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LT Clara Koch, USN
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LT Michael Gardner, USN
LTM #1045

CAPT Pete Riebe, USN
LTM #1091

AWR2 Joe Gardner, USN, LTM #1102 & AWR2 Billy Cook, USN, LTM #928

AWRCS Brian McGarrigle, USN
LTM 1100

LT Connor Daniels, USN
LTM #1054

CAPT Al Worthy, USN (Ret.)
LTM #1112

First Off Deck

By LT Samantha "Amber" Hein, USN

Welcome back, Rotor Review Readers!

When we first decided on the theme for this issue, we wanted something that would be aligned with the theme of Symposium. With the unfortunate cancellation of the Symposium, we still found the "First Off Deck" theme to be a compelling centerpiece for this issue. In order to support the mission of the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, we need our helicopters and vertical lift platforms on scene first. These players are often the first off deck and the last to land creating a wholesome force poised to provide constant support.

This issue contains a plethora of engaging deployment-related accounts as well as some interesting opinion pieces. I recommend you take a chance to read some first-hand accounts from HSM-74's deployment. "Red Sea Rescue" and "A CEL OIC's Introduction to Combat at Sea" both provide interesting perspective on what deployment looks like right now. Additionally, "From Concept to Capability" covers advancements in the MH-60S platform. How could these advancements be used to advance techniques during deployment? Finally, check out "Why We Need More FACTS" and "NAWDC: Warfighting" for varying perspectives on things that need more emphasis in the future of Naval Aviation.

As we look toward the next issue and the future of Rotor Review, expect some changes. Expect future issues of Rotor Review to come to you in the digital form. I will also be turning over the reigns as Editor in Chief and will being turnover during our next issue. As we prep for the summer issue, expect us to continue to highlight your deployment experience. We want to hear how the deployment landscape has changed over the years and how tactical training and preparation aided in the successful execution of our missions.

As always, we love to hear from you! We look forward to sharing your stories. The focus of the next Rotor Review will be Train to Fight. The deadline for submissions is July 1. Rotor Review is your magazine and your forum. Help us tell your story.

V/r,
Amber

Tell Us What You Think!

It is always great to hear from our membership! We need your input to ensure that Rotor Review keeps you informed, connected, and entertained. We maintain many open channels to contact the magazine staff for feedback, suggestions, praise, complaints, or publishing corrections. Please advise us if you do not wish to have your input published in the magazine. Your anonymity will be respected. Post comments on the NHA Facebook Page or send an email to the Editor-in-Chief. Her email is 1samhein@gmail.com or to the Managing Editor at rotorreview@navalhelicopterassn.org.

Letters to the editor, comments, articles, and news items are all welcomed from NHA's general membership and corporate associates. Articles should be of general interest to the readership and geared toward current Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard affairs, technical advances in the rotary wing / tilt rotor industry, or of historical interest. Humorous articles are encouraged.

All submissions can be sent via email to your community editor (their emails are on page 3), the Editor-in-Chief (1samhein@gmail.com), or the Managing Editor (rotorreview@navalhelicopterassn.org). You can use snail mail too.

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- Articles: MS Word Documents for text. Do not embed your images within the document. Send as a separate attachment.
- Photos and Vector Images: Should be as high a resolution as possible and sent as a separate file from the article. Please include a suggested caption that has the following information: date, names, ranks or titles, location, and credit the photographer or source of your image.
- Videos: Must be in a mp4, mov, wmv, or avi format. With your submission, please include the title and caption of all media, photographer's name, command, and the length of the video.
- Verify the media does not display any classified information.
- Ensure all maneuvers comply with NATOPS procedures.
- All submissions shall be tasteful and in keeping with good order and discipline.
- All submissions should portray the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and individual units in a positive light.

Helicopters in the Indo-Pacific

By RDML Amy Bauernschmidt, USN

The strategic importance of our naval forces in the U.S. 7th Fleet cannot be overstated. Maritime matters dominate the region, interactions with allies and adversaries are complex necessitating care, and vast distances demand a sustained and agile naval presence. Whether advancing high end tactics or enhancing military-to-military relationships with pivotal allies and partners, among the most valuable and versatile assets in our modern naval arsenal are the helicopter and the sea service professionals who employ them.

Helicopters remain a vital and versatile element in our operations. They ensure security and deterrence, play a crucial role in safeguarding sovereign rights, ensuring sea denial, promoting sea control, and helping to maintain regional stability. Equipped with advanced surveillance, reconnaissance, and combat capabilities, helicopters operating in the Western Pacific offer both tactical and operational advantages essential to the U.S. as we work alongside our allies and partners to maintain open sea lanes, deter aggression, and preserve a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Ready Platforms

Helicopters, always on alert, are ready agile assets to launch in response to crises and provocations at sea. Their ability to surge quickly from an array of deployed platforms offers unmatched responsiveness and reach, a key element in preserving maritime security, providing support and presence to protect national interests even in the most contested waters. Such a ready capability assures allies and acts as a powerful deterrent against adversaries who might otherwise seek to challenge maritime borders or encroach on a nation's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This rapid response posture, along with the ability to identify, track, and engage emerging threats as well as conduct reconnaissance and provide invaluable intelligence throughout the operating area, expands response options and preserves valuable decision space for commanders.

The increasingly complex maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific requires our operators to continue to hone our combat readiness, directly affecting the strength of our deterrence and value of our naval presence. As maritime threats continue to evolve, our helicopters, a time tested combat platform, remain ready and indispensable to this critical theater of operations.

Beyond valuable support to our own operations, even the contribution of one supporting helicopter can demonstrate our commitment to allies and partners who share our dedication to preserving maritime stability in the region. Particularly in the Indo-Pacific, our neighbors, but also the rest of the world, are paying more attention to this maritime theater, and our helicopters offer flexible options to work, train, and operate with like-minded nations to preserve freedom to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows.

Then CAPT Amy Bauernschmidt observing sea and anchor detail on the bridge of the USS San Diego in 2020. **U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Benjamin K. Kittleson.**

Improve Lethality

Helicopters help ensure that highly-capable forces are present, visible, and, if necessary, lethal. This credible capability directly contributes to the reduction of hostile actions, as adversaries are less likely to act when they know robust air and naval assets stand ready to respond and challenge any incursions.

At a time when global competition for maritime dominance is intensifying, helicopters provide critical support for sea denial operations. In the event of conflict, they are multi-faceted tools for intervening with enemy vessels, disrupting supply chains, supporting our forces, and denying adversaries the ability to maneuver freely or employ force unchecked. By ensuring the adversary cannot easily navigate the seas, helicopter presence enhances the ability to project power, enforce blockades, and achieve/maintain naval supremacy.

Strengthen Warfighting

Helicopters provide a critical enabler to every aspect of warfighting. Whether surveilling the battle space, hunting submarines, neutralizing drones, completing the kill chain or executing logistics, every element of our naval warfighting is enabled by a helicopter and the team supporting their operations. Mission effectiveness often depends on the well-coordinated efforts of Sailors, pilots, and support personnel working in close collaboration. Together, they comprise an essential component of maritime power projection lethality.

First Off Deck

In the complex landscape of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, where the world's most vital trade routes meet a strategic military theater, the importance of safeguarding sovereign rights and upholding international law are essential. A key asset we are counting on to advance these priorities is the capable, combat tested, and tried&true naval helicopter. Essential for the immediate defense of national interests, it also serves as a powerful tool in deterring aggression, ensuring sea denial and control, and strengthening alliances and partnerships in this region and around the globe.

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First Off Deck

By CAPT Ken Colman, USN
Commodore, HSMWINGPAC

HSM-74 launching on a mission.

Hello, Rotor Review. It is an absolute privilege to address NHA and contribute to this edition of Rotor Review, especially with the fitting theme of "First Off Deck."

As I look back on my career in this amazing organization, I have had a front-row seat to witness the growing importance of our community as we have transitioned from flying the SH-60B, SH-60F, and HH-60H to the MH-60R and the MH-60S, the world's greatest maritime rotary platforms and mainstays of the Fleet. As our platforms changed, our mission and capabilities have developed. I can confidently say it is truly a remarkable time to be a naval helicopter aviator. The demand for what we bring to the fight has never been higher, and the eye-watering talent within our ranks is second-to-none. From the cutting-edge technology we employ to the unwavering dedication of our personnel, the naval helicopter community is leading the way in Naval Aviation.

The phrase "First Off Deck" resonates either with the unique role helicopters play when deployed independently, in an expeditionary construct, or with the Carrier Strike Group. We are often the first eyes and ears, extending the reach of and providing crucial situational awareness to the surface fleet. Whether it is through anti-submarine warfare, surface warfare, electronic warfare, logistics, combat search and rescue, personnel recovery, or humanitarian assistance, naval rotary wing assets are frequently the initial responders, paving the way for the fixed-wing assets that follow. Helicopters are an agile platform, but it is the ability of our aircrews to adjust to a rapidly changing battlespace that make our contributions essential to the overall success of naval operations.

The 'first off, last on' mentality is deep-seated through our training. It is more than just a schedule; it is a specific mindset. We are instilled with the understanding that we are the tip of the spear, the ones pushing the boundaries and facing the unknown first. This requires a unique blend of confidence, meticulous preparation, and a willingness to accept calculated risks. We understand the responsibility that comes with being the frontrunner, and we embrace it, recognizing that our performance sets the tone for the entire force.

The helicopter mission has evolved significantly in recent years. While our core competencies remain vital, we have also seen an expansion into new areas, driven by technological advancements and evolving operational requirements. Unmanned systems, data analytics, and advanced sensor technologies such as digital ESM, digital MAD, and EEMU are transforming how we conduct our missions. We are no longer just a platform; we are a critical node in the information network, providing real-time intelligence, surveillance, and targeting data to the entire strike group. This evolution requires a constant commitment to training and innovation, ensuring that our personnel are equipped to leverage the latest technologies and tactics.

From the vast expanse of the Pacific to the complex littorals of the Middle East, our aircraft and personnel have consistently delivered, and their execution has been exemplary. Recent deployments with the Eisenhower and Lincoln Carrier Strike Groups have vividly demonstrated the value of naval helicopters as they have "defended the sea-base" against both surface and airborne threats. Admiral Marc "Stem" Miguez, former Commander, Carrier Strike Group Two, lauded the incredible value of the Swamp Foxes of HSM-74 and Dusty Dogs of HSC-7 to his "Blue Collar Strike Group" during their post-deployment brief. The actions of the entire Strike Group while engaged in direct combat for such a long period were both impressive and truly inspirational. Similarly, HSM-71's outstanding performance alongside the Lincoln Carrier Strike Group amplifies the Fleet's call to the Pentagon: The Strike Group needs increased capability in this platform [MH-60R and MH-60S], and we need it now.

These two deployments underscore the versatility of the platform and the adaptability of our personnel. They highlight the trust that the Strike Group Commanders place in our capabilities, and they reinforce the critical role we play in projecting power around the globe.

Of course, this high demand for our capabilities comes with a high operational tempo (OPTEMPO). The pace of deployments, exercises, and training are demanding, placing a significant burden on our squadrons, personnel, and their families. Maintaining readiness while balancing the needs of our Sailors and their families is a constant challenge. We must be mindful of the cumulative effects of OPTEMPO and ensure the well being of our people. This includes providing adequate resources, fostering a culture of support, and ensuring that our Sailors have the time they need to rest, recharge, and connect with their loved ones. We must also continue to advocate for predictable and sustainable deployment schedules, allowing our squadrons to plan and execute their missions effectively while minimizing the impact on their personnel.

Despite the challenges posed by OPTEMPO, the spirit and dedication within the naval helicopter community remain unwavering. I am consistently impressed by the professionalism, ingenuity, and resilience of our Sailors. They are unequivocally the true strength of our force, and they are what make our community so successful. From the maintainers who work tirelessly to keep our aircraft flying to the aircrew who execute complex missions with laser-like precision and courage, every member of the team plays a vital role. It is their dedication that enables us to consistently meet the demands placed upon us and deliver exceptional results.

Looking forward, I am incredibly optimistic about the future of naval rotary-wing aviation. The ongoing advancements in technology, coupled with the talent and dedication of our personnel, will ensure that we remain at the forefront of Naval Aviation for years to come. We will continue to adapt, innovate, and evolve, ensuring that we are always ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow. The naval helicopter community is a vital asset to our nation, and I am incredibly proud to be a part of it. "First Off Deck" is not just a motto, it is a reflection of our commitment to service, excellence, and unwavering dedication to the mission. It is a true privilege to lead this remarkable community, and I am excited to see what we accomplish together in the years ahead.

HSC-7 Fast Rope

First to Launch, Last to Land: The Unwavering Commitment of Naval Helicopters

By CMDCM (NAC/AW/SW) Keith "Flip" Griffin, USN (Ret.)

In Naval Aviation, few elements, like the Helicopter Community, embody the spirit of dedication and mission readiness. Our operational mantra, "First to Launch, Last to Land," is more than a slogan; it's a lived experience. It is forged through countless hours in the air, enduring sea states that test both aircraft and crew, and a relentless drive to be the guardian angels of the flight deck. From my firsthand experience as a Search and Rescue Corpsman, I've seen the grit, the exhaustion, and the absolute commitment that defines our community. Whether operating from a massive aircraft carrier, an amphibious assault ship, or a smaller combatant vessel, these versatile aircraft form the backbone of the Navy's ability to project power, ensure safety, and respond to crises in real-time.

The Vital Role of the SAR Helo

Before the roar of jet engines pierces the deck. Before the first catapult shot hurls a fighter into the sky, Naval Aviation flight operations begin with a helicopter in the air. The search and rescue (SAR) helo is the unsung hero, ensuring every launch cycle can proceed with a safety net. Positioned strategically around the carrier, these helicopters are ready to respond instantly should an aircraft emergency occur. From pilot ejections to aircraft malfunctions that require an immediate recovery, the SAR crew is the safety linchpin that allows the rest of the air wing to execute their mission.

This isn't just theory—it's reality. I remember one particular night, fighting to keep our helo steady as we hovered in unpredictable seas, waiting for a downed pilot. The adrenaline, the training kicking in, and the absolute certainty that failure wasn't an option. In these moments, you truly understand what it means to be the last line of defense. The commitment doesn't waver throughout the day. As aircraft cycle on and off the flight deck, the SAR helicopter remains aloft, ever-watchful and prepared. Even in the final moments of flight operations, when the last fixed-wing aircraft returns to the deck, the helicopter is still airborne, ensuring a vigilant watch until the end. Only after the final aircraft safely lands can the SAR helo crew return to the ship, fulfilling their "last to land" obligation.

The role of the SAR helicopter extends beyond just being an emergency response unit. SAR helicopters often coordinate with other shipborne assets, ensuring quick medevac operations for injured personnel, assisting with overwater rescues, and even playing a role in maritime security operations. The SAR crews undergo rigorous training to ensure they are prepared for any contingency, including open-water recoveries in harsh conditions and rapid-response medical interventions. Their presence is reassuring and indispensable for the safe execution of naval flight operations.

More Than Just SAR

While SAR is a crucial component of naval helicopter operations, it is not their only role. The Naval Helicopter Community is deeply ingrained in carrier air operations. Helicopters are responsible for logistics, personnel transport, medical evacuations, and maritime strike capabilities.

As we all know, Helicopter Sea Combat (HSC) squadrons operate MH-60S Seahawks, providing vertical replenishment, combat search and rescue (CSAR), and mine countermeasures. Helicopter Maritime Strike (HSM) squadrons deploy the MH-60R, specializing in anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare. Their ability to deploy quickly and adapt to mission requirements makes them indispensable in combat and support roles.

Additionally, helicopters serve as crucial enablers of expeditionary warfare. When amphibious-ready groups embark on operations, helicopters are the first assets in the air, ensuring straightforward landing zones, providing close air support, and facilitating the rapid insertion of Marines and special operations forces.

Naval helicopters also contribute to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions, utilizing advanced sensor systems to track potential threats in the maritime domain. Their versatility allows them to support Fleet-wide operations, assisting surface combatants in anti-submarine warfare, monitoring adversary movements, and enhancing overall situational awareness. Their adaptability makes them critical assets in both peacetime deterrence and wartime engagements.

The Grind of Flight OPS

Maintaining this cycle of being first to launch and last to land is no small feat. It requires meticulous planning, endurance, and a relentless work ethic from pilots, aircrew, maintainers, and support personnel.

Naval helicopter squadrons' operational tempo is intense, from pre-dawn briefings to post-flight maintenance checks that stretch deep into the night. Crew rest cycles must be managed carefully, and aircraft maintenance must be performed with unwavering attention to detail to ensure readiness for the next launch. Weather, sea state, and mission requirements can all shift immediately, demanding flexibility and a calm, professional approach from all involved.

Flight operations aboard an aircraft carrier or amphibious assault ship are grueling. The noise, vibrations, and sheer complexity of carrier-based flight operations require exceptional focus and resilience. Helicopter pilots and aircrew members must contend with weather conditions, night operations, and high-stakes missions that can change immediately. The exhaustion and stress of repeated launch and recovery cycles test the mental and physical fortitude of every member of the helicopter squadron.

I've stood in the back of a helo, counting down the minutes until recovery, feeling the weight of every decision made in that aircraft. I've seen maintainers pull all-nighters in the hangar, knowing that a missed detail could mean the difference between life and death. There's no room for complacency in this community.

The Culture of Commitment

The Naval Helicopter Community takes immense pride in its "First to Launch, Last to Land" ethos. This badge of honor symbolizes the unwavering commitment to the mission and the trust placed in their capabilities by the rest of the air wing. This culture of commitment extends beyond the flight deck, influencing every facet of a naval aviator's career.

In training, deployment, and combat, helicopter crews understand their role is to be ever-present, ever-ready, and ever-reliable. They embody the values of dedication, sacrifice, and operational excellence, ensuring that no aircraft launches without the safety and support of their rotor-winged counterparts.

This commitment is fostered through a strong sense of camaraderie within helicopter squadrons. The bonds formed through shared experiences—long maintenance nights, challenging rescue operations, and high-intensity deployments—create a culture of teamwork and mutual respect. The collective drive to excel and support one another defines the Helicopter Community and solidifies its reputation as an integral force within Naval Aviation.

Conclusion

Naval helicopters are the silent sentinels of carrier operations, their rotors spinning in dedication to the safety and success of every flight. Their presence enables the mission to proceed, safeguards aviators' lives, and ensures that a helicopter is still in the air when the last jet traps aboard, standing the final watch.

First to launch. Last to land. Always Ready.

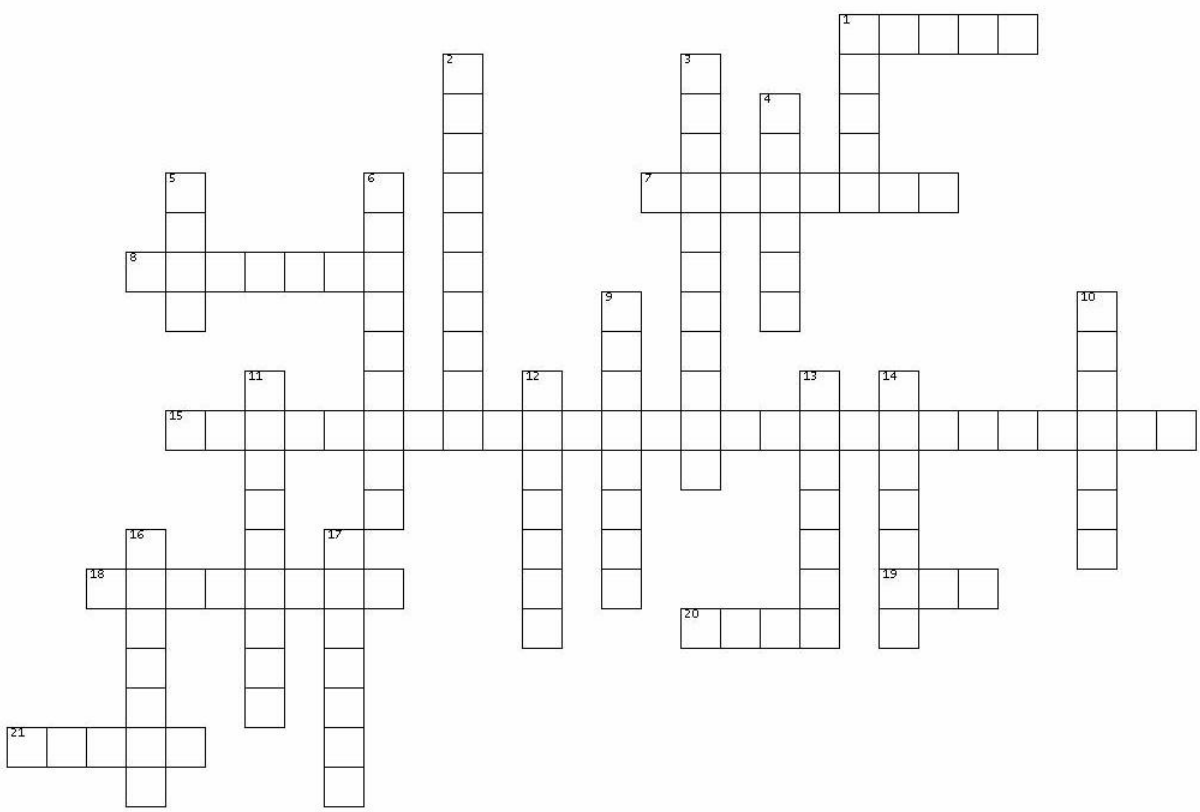
The Naval Helicopter Community's unwavering commitment to this principle exemplifies the highest standards of professionalism and service. Whether ensuring the safety of fellow aviators, executing complex combat missions, or providing humanitarian aid, these aircraft and their crews embody the best of Naval Aviation. Their dedication and sacrifice do not go unnoticed by those who understand the true nature of life at sea, where the mission is never complete until the last aircraft—often a helicopter—returns home safely.

An MH-60S extracts SAR Swimmers embarked aboard the amphibious assault ship, USS Saipan (LHA 2), from the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. **U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate Airman Gary L. Johnson. III**

First Off Deck

Try your hand at this crossword puzzle. Good luck!

By LT Brendan "Potty" Gould, USN



ACROSS

1. Hold here, please.
7. Not checking in here would be very whiskey.
8. The first up and the last down usually have to eat this on the ship.
15. The forward-most of the first off deck.
18. SAR capability given in local time or hours and minutes, depending on your Carrier Strike Group.
19. The First Off Deck MH-60R (Romeo) starts to build this.
20. These entities end up flying most of clue 14.
21. Launch and recovery window.

DOWN

1. The Combat Element (CEL) JO responsible for the maintainers.
2. The First Off Deck MH-60S (Sierra) is assigned this.
3. Climb the island and get some sun if this is your duty.
4. If your answer to number 11 is bad, better hope maintenance has one of these available.
5. An anti-submarine warfare (ASW)-configured MH-60R needs one of these before takeoff.
6. The case you would use to launch off the carrier if it's dark or cloudy.
9. Where the folded helicopters get stuffed on a carrier deck.
10. Navy aircraft all fly these; the faster your aircraft, the bigger they are.
11. The act of crawling all over the aircraft to make sure it's safe to fly.
12. If you're heavy, ask for a takeoff _____.
13. A west coast Landing Signal Officer (LSO), much to the jet pilots' chagrin.
14. Nosferatu, or overnight operations.
16. Another name for the NAVAIR 00-80T-105 CV NATOPS Manual, “Helicopter Restrictions During Fixed-Wing Launch/Recovery” Diagram.
17. A command to land aboard the ship.

Answers on page 69

First Off Deck: A Tribute to Navy Spouses

By Megan "Megatron" Buriak

In Naval Aviation, "First Off Deck" is more than just taking off first—it's about being prepared, adaptable, and steady under pressure. For rotary-wing aviators, it means leading the way, handling challenges mid-flight, and adjusting when plans change. You're no different. As significant others, you're constantly navigating the unexpected.

Rolling with the Changes

Life as a Navy spouse is anything but predictable. Schedules shift, deployments happen, and plans get rewritten at the last minute. Helicopters are built to operate in tough conditions—landing on moving ships, flying in unpredictable weather, and adapting on the go. You're doing the same. Whether you're managing the household alone during a long deployment, adjusting to last-minute duty changes, or making big decisions without a copilot, you figure it out as you go.

Setting the Tone

Being "First Off Deck" isn't just about launching first, it's about setting the standard. You're the one who sets the tone for how you handle this lifestyle—staying strong, finding solutions, and keeping things moving even when life throws a curveball. You support your aviator, but you're also a leader in your own right—whether you're maintaining a sense of normalcy for your family, keeping traditions alive, or helping fellow spouses through their own challenges. You're not just reacting, you're taking charge.

Strength in Community

No aviator flies solo, and neither do you. The strength of a good squadron isn't just in its aircrew—it's in the families who support them. You're part of a community that keeps each other grounded. Whether you're helping a new spouse navigate their first deployment or simply leaning on someone who understands this lifestyle, you're building connections that make all the difference. At the end of the day, you're the one making it work. You're managing the home front, supporting your aviator, and still chasing your own goals. Navy spouses don't just wait for things to settle—you're adapting, pushing forward, and overcoming.

Thank You

To the spouses who keep everything running—you're the true meaning of "First Off Deck" in every way. You're strong, you're resilient, and you're appreciated. Thank you for all you do!

The Mailroom of Naval Aviation - A JO in the 70s

By CAPT Arne Nelson, USN (Ret.), LTM #4 / RW # 13762, President, NHASF

Ahoy Shipmates and Helo Bubbas!

Donate: First, thank you to our 2024 and 2025 donors, particularly those of you who donated during the "Giving Tuesday" Campaign. Adding it all up, including the generous Big Iron and Night Dipper Funds, golf revenues, and our healthy investment accounts, we have exceeded our 2025 goal of $75,000. That goal funds 15 $5,000 scholarships this year.

Funds for the 2025 scholarship season continue to grow. Since 2020, the start of the current five year strategic plan, NHA Scholarship Fund (SF) accounts have increased from $618k to $883k while awarding $289,500 to 89 highly qualified undergrad, graduate, and postgraduate students, including military personnel (USN, USMC, USCG) and their family members and Gold Star families. We are on track to disburse the funds in June or July.

Apply: The application period ended on 31 January with one of the strongest slates yet submitted. After scouring the applications for a tight personal statement, the appropriate letters of recommendation, and the most current transcripts, we distributed 74 completed applications to our regional and functional selection boards.

2025 Applications

Region	ONE San Diego	TWO Wash DC	THREE Jax	FOUR Norfolk	FIVE TRACOM	SIX OCONUS	SEVEN Functional	Total
Total Applications	22	23	19	12	3	NONE	11	90
Complete Applications	20	18	17	9	3	-	7	74
Incomplete Apps/ineligible	2	5	2	3	0	-	4	16
Scholarships assigned (tentative)	4	3	3	2	1	NOTE	2	15

Notes: Region Five combined with Region Four. Region Six had two applicants that shifted to region Seven/Functional Group – active duty personnel and military spouses.

Regional and Functional Selection Boards are complete with results approved by the Scholarship Board. Scholarship winning candidates have all been notified and we will publish the awardees in the summer edition of Rotor Review.

Recruiting: Contact Arne Nelson or Mike Brattland if you are interested in any of four NHASF Committee positions that include:

- **Executive Vice President / Vice President, Ops and Scholarships:** Shall perform all the duties of the President in his/her absence and shall ensure day-to-day operations of the fund are consistent with the bylaws and operations manual. Develop and modify selection processes and procedures as required. Oversee the scholarship application and selection process.

- **Vice President, Plans/Marketing/Fundraising**: Develop the annual strategic plan and determine the marketing and fundraising effort needed to fundraise scholarship and overhead funds.

- **Vice President, Finance:** Monitor the investment fund accounts, making recommendations for changes as needed.

- **Secretary:** Shall ensure that the original records of the Scholarship Fund are maintained at the principal office; ensure that all records, books, reports and statements required by law are properly kept.

On August 2, 1990 the Iraqi Army Rolled into Kuwait

On August 10, HC-4 launched its Desert Shield detachment, two aircraft, eight pilots, eight aircrew, and 25 maintenance personnel, deploying 1760 NM to King Faisal (KF) Naval Base, 20 miles south of Jeddah, SA. Our flight route had taken us from Sigonella through Souda Bay Crete, Alexandria EG, and Luxor EG to KF NAS, the Saudi Naval Air Station south of the city. There we set up the Forward Logisics Support (FLS) for the Red Sea Logistics effort and started flying the twice-daily flights from Jeddah to the tip of the Sinai, establishing the log pipeline to the two CVs operating in the Northern Red Sea. We had an adventure (or two) at every stop.

Our 459 NM flight to Souda was uneventful. As we approached the west coast of Greece, we could not pick up the NAVAID due to our low altitude.

Copilot said, "Omega says to turn south now, and then, we should climb to pick up the airway."

I replied, "We should hold our current heading for another five minutes. We are probably shy about 10 miles."

We stayed on course until we had gone about ten miles, then turned south. Finally, we were high enough to pick up the NAVAID which showed we were right on course.

Copilot asked, "How did you know?"

"Look up straight above us…a contrail on the airway – perfectly on course – follow it until we pick up Kalamata. Then, we'll have a straight shot to Souda," I replied.

After arriving we checked into the hotel and all went out to get dinner. For us, Souda was a second home. We flew to or through Souda regularly. With a busy day ahead of us, I went back to the hotel to review the flight planning and get some sleep. After settling in, I heard a lot of noise and music through the wall from the adjacent room. I banged on the wall and got a return drum roll as they cranked up the music another notch. So I banged again and told them to knock it off. A voice said, "Who's there?" and "Go away!"

I'd had enough, and answered "It's the F*****G Skipper!"

The door swung open to the astonished airman, who looked at me and replied, "It IS the F*****G Skipper." Then things got quiet.

The Alexandria leg, a straight 406 NM flight over open water, was uneventful until we shut down. We landed and taxied to base ops to refuel, run our passports through customs, and put

the helos to bed for the night – with a fresh start tomorrow to Jeddah via Luxor. While arranging ground transportation, we were told by the Egyptian authority that we would have to leave ASAP because the Arab League was arriving for a meeting of their heads of state - just as an Arab Falcon jet landed and taxied nearby. We were given back our passports and told to fly to Luxor. We could pass customs there, and we had to leave now. Our big CH-53Es, with a giant, white "NAVY" displayed prominently on each side, would not do at Alexandria. We flew away, following the Nile for 405 NM until arriving over the Valley of the Kings and Luxor.

Upon arriving in Luxor, we were directed to a secure area near base ops, and I was taken to the customs chief and the airport manager. There was a possibility that we were about to spend some time in the "Graybar Hotel." The Embassy/DAO had neglected to inform Luxor that we were coming. We were guarded by their security forces and required to pay all our ATC and airport handling fees in cash - costs normally paid by the DAO at the Embassy. The bottom line: pay and leave. No cash, no departure. The officers pitched in about $1,850 each to pay for the various costs including marshaling where we negotiated a 50% discount because the ground director ran away. We got everything under control by midnight and were back at the airport by 0700 ready for the next adventure.

Needless to say, there was more drama to play out before landing safely at Jeddah, but I'll save it for the next issue of Rotor Review.

First Off Deck

By CAPT Bill Personius, USN (Ret.), President, NHAHS LTM #46 / RW#1621

The CDR Clyde E. Lassen Medal of Honor Memorial is completed with the SH-60F safely mounted to the stanchion at the front gate of Naval Base Coronado/Naval Air Station North Island. I personally had a great time over Dedication Ceremony Weekend starting with a Happy Hour at the I-Bar on the evening of January 24 with the two FRSs (HSC-3 and HSM-41) while they celebrated a Fleet-Up / Soft Patch Ceremony followed by a lot of professional discussions and camaraderie. There were a lot of people who came in for the weekend and NHAHS had tables set up displaying Lassen memorabilia, coins, patches, and bricks for sale. LCDR Chip Lancaster, CDR John Ball, and myself answered questions about the weekend while Megan Buriak sold chances for a very nice Lassen SH-60F Model. It was great to see all the people from HC-7 in town. This was a special moment for them seeing fellow squadron mates being recognized by the dedication of this monument.

On Saturday, we had the Dedication Ceremony at the Lowry Base Theater, and it was great having the Air Boss, Region Commander, and the XO, CMC, and the Sailor of the Year from USS Lassen in attendance. We had several flag officers there as well, including RADMs Fillion, Kraft, Hall, and RADM Jones was our keynote address speaker. Rounding out the DVs was CAPT John Holtzclaw, USN (Ret.), the F-4 Pilot who was rescued by Clyde and his crew. He spoke to the crowd of 300+ and kept everyone mesmerized telling his recount of the rescue. The ceremony concluded with the USS Lassen crew members and CAPT Holtzclaw unveiling the actual monument placard that contains Clyde's photo and Medal of Honor Citation.

On Saturday evening, the HC-7 crowd had a reception at the Wyndham Hotel in the Claim Jumpers Restaurant. On Sunday, January 26, CAPT Jeff "JMel" Melody hosted a plaque dedication ceremony at the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial. CAPT Sandy Clark, USN (Ret.) provided the keynote address and HSC-3 and HSM-41 provided the flyover. It started out as a rainy misty day, but the sky opened up and it was a beautiful day by the time the ceremony started. Videos and still pictures of these events are located on the NHAHS Website.

The majority of the project is complete; however there is still plenty to do. The final plaque was just attached to the monument and more bricks are still being ordered. We will continue to order bricks as long as there are open spots at the base of the monument. If you have not ordered a brick and still want one, please go to the NHAHS Website and place your order online.

I want to thank all the personnel who donated funds to the project and all those who donated their time and talent to making the project a reality.

So what is next for NHAHS? We will be selling bricks and will have one or two pilot seats for sale.

Consider becoming a member of NHAHS and have a happy and safe summer vacation.

Keep your turns up!
Regards,
CAPT P.

Helpful Information

SH-60F Time Lapse Photo Sequence: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1146104766894018

The SH-60F Dedication Ceremony video from January 11, 2025: https://www.facebook.com/NavalBaseCoronado/videos/1423119675317458
Mt. Soledad Pictures and Fox 5 Interview: https://sh60fhoas.navalhelicopterassociation.org/mt-soledad-plaque-dedication-ceremony-January-26-2025/

Updated Photos of the SH-60F Project can be found here: https://sh60fhoas.navalhelicopterassociation.org/sh-60-foxtrot-progress/

Make a donation to the project by buying a brick. https://sh60fhoas.navalhelicopterassociation.org/corporate-sponsorship/
I encourage you to watch the Lassen Video. https://sh60fhoas.navalhelicopterassociation.org/lassen-moh-history-video/

https://sh60fhoas.navalhelicopterassociation.org/corporate-sponsorship/

Lassen Brick Sales

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Now Be Part Of It...
Order a Brick!

Great Idea for
a Loved One!

4" x 8"	$125.00
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Bricks Purchased Now Will Be Ordered in
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From Concept to Capability: The MH-60S and the Future of Naval Aviation

By CDR Dermot "Duchess" Killian, USN and LT Jodi "Llama Llama" Cull-Host, USN

Introduction

In under 800 days, Naval Aviation must prepare its force to meet the Chief of Naval Operations' (CNO) NAVPLAN 2024, which emphasizes readiness for potential crises or conflicts. For anyone familiar with the Department of Defense's (DOD) acquisition process, this timeline seems incredibly tight for introducing new technology to the Fleet. However, we have entered an era of rapid technological advancement, requiring the U.S. military to innovate at unprecedented speed if we are to keep pace with our adversaries.

A stark example of this competition is China's shipbuilding capacity. The 2023 China Military Power Report[1] by the U.S. Department of Defense notes that China now possesses the largest navy in the world, with approximately 370 ships and submarines, far outpacing the United States in fleet size. Moreover, China's shipbuilding industry out produces the United States by a factor of 232, allowing for rapid naval expansion and modernization.[2] This overwhelming disparity underscores the urgent need for technological innovation within U.S. Naval Aviation. Positioned at the center of the next Great Power Competition (GPC), the Naval Aviation Enterprise must act swiftly and creatively to remain competitive.

Lockheed Martin's Initial Proposal

In August 2024, Lockheed Martin approached HSC Wing Pacific Commodore, CAPT Will Eastham, with a PowerPoint presentation titled "Demonstration Possibilities." The proposal outlined modular, rapidly deployable technological upgrades for the MH-60S platform, showcasing an opportunity to transform its mission capabilities. Among the proposed enhancements were:

- A Starlink antenna for proliferated Low Earth Orbit (pLEO) communications, enabling global connectivity
- Digital Electronic Support Measures (DESM) to enhance Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities
- Silvus Mesh-Net antennas for secure, resilient communications
- A VIDAR array—an AI-based vision system capable of detecting personnel in the water.

The presentation concluded with a pivotal question: "What is your level of interest in these capabilities?" Commodore Eastham's answer was decisive—focus on pLEO communications and DESM systems, recognizing their immediate operational potential. This decision ignited

An AT secures the plexiglass over the Starlink mini antenna mounted on the nose of HSC-23's MH-60S helicopter.

a collaborative sprint between Lockheed Martin, the NAVAIR Class Desk and associated structural engineers, and the West Coast HSC Wing managed by HSC Weapon School Pacific, setting a new standard for rapid innovation.

By September, just one month later, Lockheed Martin engineers arrived in San Diego, armed with freshly machined parts and an Interim Flight Clearance (IFC) for ground testing. The team wasted no time, conducting fit-checks on an HSC-4 MH-60S to ensure the new systems could be safely mounted and integrated with existing airframe power.

Fast-forward another 45 days to November 4th, Lockheed Martin returned with a flight-approved IFC for a reconfigured MH-60S—a remarkably swift turnaround in a process that traditionally takes years.

On November 6th, HSC-23 launched its MH-60S aircraft outfitted with:

- A Starlink antenna mounted on the FLIR diving board for pLEO communications;
- A DESM antenna mounted on the cabin floor with port-side door access; and

- A Silvus radio integrated into an Airborne Low Frequency Sonar (ALFS) funnel assembly, secured to the helicopter's cargo hook bay.

Over the next three weeks, these enhancements were rigorously tested during MISR Resolute Hunter, a joint military exercise designed to validate emerging capabilities in advanced operational environments.

Technical Achievements

The demonstrations achieved several milestones, including:

1. pLEO Communications: The team successfully achieved both encrypted and unencrypted communications through the Starlink antenna while in flight—despite the known technical challenge of rotor shadowing (signal disruption caused by rotor blades), the team successfully demonstrated unencrypted in-flight communications with the capability of encrypted communications in the future. This capability enabled global, real-time connectivity, a critical requirement for modern combat operations and proved to be a resilient means of communication.

2. DESM Integration: The DESM System effectively demonstrated its ability to detect, process, and transmit electronic warfare (EW) data. The system shared ISR information across platforms, including both MH-60S and MH-60R helicopters. Using Joint Interoperability Communication Data (JICD) standards, the MH-60S sent geolocation reports to the ground station.

3. Self-Healing MANET: Leveraging Silvus Mesh-Net Antennas, the systems established a self-healing Mobile Ad-hoc Network (MANET) to transmit data reliably in complex or contested environments. The Sierra successfully transmitted a third-party video feed via Mesh-Net and pLEO to a ground station, showcasing its role as a 'communications as a service' hub. This network extended control and communication to platforms like Ocean Aero's Triton USSV and Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Teams.

Why It Matters

These advancements unlocked significant potential for the MH-60S Community. By integrating commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) technology, HSC Wing Pacific demonstrated a low-cost, high-impact approach to innovation—one that delivers operational capabilities in months rather than years.

If the technical details are overwhelming, the bottom line is this: We proved that the MH-60S can be rapidly adapted into a multi-domain ISR and communication powerhouse, ready to meet the challenges of the high-end fight.

Breaking Down the Capabilities

The recent demonstrations of pLEO communications, DESM integration, and MANET interoperability have significantly expanded the operational potential of the MH-60S, reaffirming its reputation as the "Swiss Army Knife" of Naval Aviation. These enhancements can be broken down into five key capabilities:

1. Advanced ISR and EW Detection (DESM):

The Digital Electronic Support Measures (DESM) Antenna transforms the MH-60S into a robust ISR node, capable of detecting, geolocating, and analyzing electronic warfare (EW) emitters across a broad frequency spectrum. This data is transmitted over the horizon to stakeholders worldwide using encrypted channels. The operational impact: DESM enables rapid identification and sharing of threats, providing real-time intelligence for tactical and strategic decision-making.

2. Resilient Communication and Data Relay (MANET):

Equipped with Silvus Mesh-Net Antennas, the MH-60S creates a self-healing Mobile Ad-hoc Network (MANET), ensuring communication continuity in degraded or contested environments. This network allows the MH-60S to transmit and relay data between platforms, including MH-60R helicopters, unmanned systems, and Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Teams. It will also transmit third-party video feed via Mesh-Net and relay the feed via pLEO to ground or surface stations, and act as a theater node as well as command and control (C2) unmanned vehicles and Air-Launched Effects (ALE). The MANET capability enhances connectivity and interoperability, extending communication, range, and enabling coordinated multi-platform operations.

3. Global Connectivity (pLEO Communications):

The Starlink Antenna mounted on the FLIR diving board enables proliferated Low Earth Orbit (pLEO) resilient communications, delivering real-time, global data transmission. Despite challenges posed by rotor interference (rotor shadowing), the demonstration confirmed the viability of pLEO communications on rotary-wing platforms. The MH-60S proved uniquely capable, as it allowed for antenna placement on top of the FLIR diving board mount, effectively mitigating much of the shadowing and providing an optimal antenna angle for satellite acquisition. The operational impact is that global connectivity ensures rapid ISR dissemination, supports decision-making, and bridges communication gaps during distributed operations.

4. Modular Integration and Adaptability:

The ALFS Funnel Assembly, originally designed for the MH-60R, has been adapted for the MH-60S to enhance its versatility and modular design. By reusing an existing, inventoried part number from the MH-60R, this integration

Taken inside the cabin of a MH-60S. The DESM Antenna is mounted on the side of the port cabin door, and the aircrewman is looking at the geosit display of surface geolocations being provided by the equipment.

allows for rapid capability insertion into the MH-60S, enabling maintainers to quickly install and remove antennas, sensors, and other payloads and the seamless integration of emerging technologies with minimal downtime or cost. This will provide the potential for incorporating a Digital Magnetic Anomaly Detection (DMAD) System to bolster mine detection capabilities. This innovative approach not only improves operational efficiency but also maximizes resource utilization across different platforms. The modularity of the MH-60S ensures its adaptability to evolving mission sets and technological advancements as well as maximizing its utility across domains.

5. AI and Future Technologies:

The MH-60S platform provides ample space and processing power for integrating artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced systems. AI enables real-time analysis of collected data, accelerating decision-making, and reducing the cognitive burden on aircrew. AI integration supports the Navy's Concept of Operations (CONOP) and enhances the Recognized Maritime Picture (RMP), ensuring actionable intelligence is immediately available for operational needs.

The MH-60S, enhanced with these five capabilities—DESM for ISR, MANET for resilient communication, pLEO for global connectivity, modular adaptability, and AI readiness—delivers unparalleled versatility and operational value. These advancements position the Sierra Community to contribute to the national picture and play a central role in the Navy's future high-end fight, enabling global reach, actionable intelligence, contribution to Long-Range fires, and seamless cross-domain integration.

The Future of Naval Aviation

The integration of cutting-edge technology, the inherent adaptability of the MH-60S platform, and a willingness to challenge the traditional Navy acquisition process have positioned the Naval Aviation Enterprise to deliver an invaluable, rapidly deployable resource to the Fleet. These innovations extend the Navy's global reach, enhance readiness, and provide critical capabilities for future operations.

The MH-60S is already deployed worldwide, supporting operations in and across every corner of the globe. With the addition of next-generation sensors and systems, the airframe has evolved into a highly adaptable, multi-mission platform. Each helicopter becomes another set of eyes and ears, feeding commanders and operators real-time intelligence, and connectivity to commanders and operators wherever and whenever they are needed.

This progress aligns perfectly with the Chief of Naval Operations' vision of "raising readiness across the force by 2027 to be ready for crisis or conflict."[3] By embracing innovation and accelerating technology integration, the HSC Community has not only answered the call—it has demonstrated a model for the Navy's future.

Thanks to this partnership, the MH-60S now stands ready as a force-multiplier for the Fleet. When the call comes, the Sierra Community will respond—and the world will take notice.

Footnotes

1. U.S. Department of Defense. "China Military Power Report." Accessed December 17, 2024. https://www.defense.gov/CMPR/.

2. Alliance for American Manufacturing. "China's Shipbuilding Capacity Is 232 Times Greater Than That of the United States," September 18, 2023. https://www.americanmanufacturing.org/blog/chinas-shipbuilding-capacity-is-232-times-greater-than-that-of-the-united-states.

3. Franchetti, Lisa M. "Chief of Naval Operations Navigation Plan for America's Warfighting Navy 2024." United States Navy, n.d. https://www.navy.mil/Leadership/Chief-of-Naval-Operations/CNO-NAVPLAN-2024/.

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NAWDC: Warfighting

By CAPT Dan "DT" Thomas, USN, SEAWOLF Rotary Weapons School Department Head

An MH-60R Sea Hawk assigned to the Swamp Foxes of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 74 lifts off from USS Harry S. Truman.

First Off Deck! I love this theme as Navy Rotary-Wing (RW) crews are extremely familiar with this concept, whether deployed on a U.S. Navy ship or a shore-based location. It's been this way since before all of us were flying the mighty MH-60R and MH-60S, and it will likely be this way for the foreseeable future as we continue to plan, train, and prepare for the next fight. Navy RW units bring competence, lethality, and most importantly, real-time flexibility to operational commanders.

It's never been better to be a Navy RW pilot, aircrewman, or maintainer because the appetite for what the MH-60R/S and MH-53 bring to fight in the maritime domain is unmatched by any Joint asset in the Department of Defense's (DOD) Rolodex. That being said, our adversaries are building up, and the threats are real. We must adjust, grow, and challenge traditional ways of employing and operating our airframes and squadrons. This applies to our people, in addition to our hardware and gear.

LT Anthony "Romo" Romagnoli's article adeptly describes the challenges Navy RW faces in the era of peer and near-peer conflict. As you read Romo's article, keep in mind that the themes described are not just Navy RW problems – lots of smart folks throughout the DOD are thinking through these problems and working to support every fine American who dons the U.S. Flag. Bottom line, the HSC, HSM, and HM Communities are valued by our leaders and sought after for our capabilities. It's our job to test, train, and work out the kinks to improve Navy RW capability in the changing landscape of large-scale conflict in order to categorically dominate our enemies during sustained combat operations at sea.

NAWDC: Warfighting

By LT Anthony "Romo" Romagnoli, USN, SEAWOLF Weapons and Tactics Instructor

The battlespace has significantly evolved over the past year – the conflicts in Ukraine and the Red Sea have highlighted the utilization of passive integrated air defenses, drone swarm tactics, and communications jamming techniques. The Russians have demonstrated that it is difficult for a ground force to gain control and achieve national objectives without air superiority. The Houthis have shown the effectiveness of weaponized, low-cost drones and the chaos they cause. The world is changing, and the concept of employment of rotary-wing (RW) aircraft must adapt if the Navy RW Community wishes to maintain relevance.

The next war will be unlike any other conflict the United States has experienced. Long-range enemy defense systems and over-the-horizon radars have created both a fuel-time-distance problem and signature management concerns.

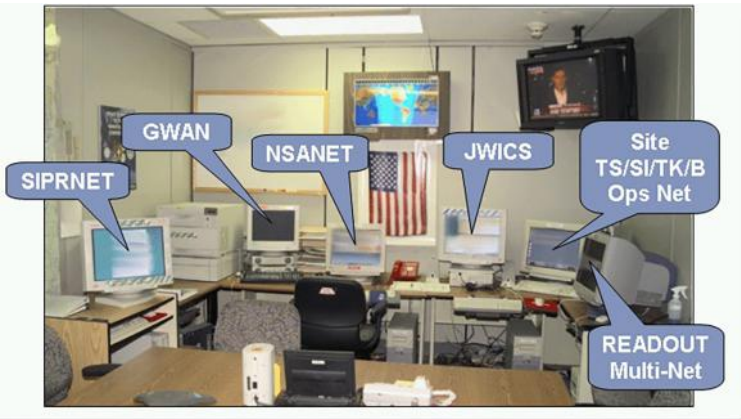
While the threat picture has evolved, our mission remains the same. Persistent surveillance and anti-submarine warfare provided by the MH-60R, and the capability of the MH-60S to recover downed aviators and provide logistics support continues to be a requirement. However, modern-day threats preclude the traditional concept of RW employment.

For the reasons described above, helicopters will be required to forward stage deeper into the battlespace, closer to potential objective areas. Against a near-peer adversary, helicopters must capitalize on small windows of opportunity by forward posturing – closing the distance between themselves and the problem, thereby reducing fuel required and time in transit.

Future RW operations, removed from the expected command and control structure, require commanders to enable their subordinates to innovate, adapt, and make decisions at the lowest level to achieve mission success. Limited information and support will increase reliance on aircrew to organically troubleshoot their systems to maximize the utility of their aircraft. Squadrons must train to be masters of their craft – from the nugget aircrew Petty Officer Third Class who just graduated from the Fleet Replacement Squadron to the Skipper with over 3,000 flight hours, every aircrew must be intimately familiar with ALL systems on their helicopter. From troubleshooting a mission system, to employing ordnance, to operating the hoist – we must pursue perfection. In wartime, there will be no room for error. RW operators must be proficient, and our systems groomed, so we can execute the mission in ways that create dilemmas for our enemies. Aircrew must maximize every flight hour in training to become a more lethal asset. Risk decisions typically made by senior officers will be delegated down to the Lieutenant Aircraft Commander and Petty Officer Second Class Crew Chief. The effectiveness of their decisions will be based on the information available to them and their contextual understanding of the problem.

To understand the problem, every RW pilot and aircrewman requires a higher level of security clearance and persistent access to the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System (JWICS) Network. This allows them to understand the ever-changing battlespace and familiarize themselves with the most up-to-date operational guidance.

SEAWOLF and SEAHUNTER Rotary-Wing Weapons Schools (RWWS) are stressing the criticality of austere operations. Every Air Wing Fallon exercise is used as a proving ground to identify the challenges associated with operating in a distributed environment. The theories discussed above will be published via a Tactical Memorandum, which will be available on the SEAWOLF Secret Internet Protocol Router (SIPR) Website and address the best ways to navigate these obstacles and prescribe recommendations to fully prepare aircrew for the next fight. For additional information on this topic, please contact your SEAWOLF or SEAHUNTER RWWS.



A visualization of the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System (JWICS) Network

Red Sea Rescue: Recovery Operations from M/V Verbena and M/V Tutor

By LT Micheal "FEMA" Sellers, USN, CEL-1, HSM-74

The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) Carrier Strike Group (IKE CSG) sailed over the horizon on October 14, 2023, and would unknowingly set off into one of the most dynamic deployments in recent naval history. The Houthis, a non-state terrorist actor based primarily out of southern Yemen, consistently launched ballistic missiles and one-way attack UAVs at Israel, merchant vessels, and U.S. Navy and allied ships to restrict the free flow of commerce through the Bab Al-Mandeb (BAM) Strait. Direct kinetic action, UAV escorts, MEDEVACs, and SARs were commonplace on this deployment. USS Philippine Sea (CG 58), with HSM-74 Combat Element One (CEL-1) embarked, participated in one of these at-sea rescues.

On June 13, 2024, USS Philippine Sea received a distress call from the Motor Vessel (M/V) Verbena, which received damage from multiple Houthi anti-ship cruise missiles in the Gulf of Aden. Responding quickly, the guided missile cruiser Captain called upon CEL-1 to conduct a MEDEVAC for a severely injured mariner onboard the merchant vessel. The crew and maintenance team sprang into action, preparing the helicopter and flight deck for immediate launch.

AMBUSH 703 (AH703) launched 60 miles southwest of M/V Verbena at 1419, only one hour after receiving the distress call. Enroute, the aircrewmen, AWR2 Haisley and AWR2 Zepeda, began configuring the cabin for the rescue, while the pilots, LCDR Trey "Sid" Wheeler and LT Joshua "Flanders" Michael, discussed the possible courses of action and began to communicate with a P-8 stationed overhead as a communications relay.

Seeing the winds out of the northeast at 14 knots, LCDR Wheeler requested M/V Verbena maneuver to provide ideal winds to accomplish a recovery via hoist, providing an estimated course of 250. The aircrewmen and the accompanying ship's corpsman, HM2 Morrison, completed rigging for rescue and the crew then briefed an updated plan of action. The ship was still making way at about 12 knots and the only hoisting point would be above the forward cargo hold, in between the foremast and kingpost. The pilots would have to maneuver the helicopter precisely to fly sideward to match ship speed, while their rotor arc would be below the two posts with only 30 feet of clearance on each side.

Thirty minutes after launch, AH703 was on station and conducted a visual evaluation of the ship and the damage it received. The Houthi missiles erupted the port stern hull, which was billowing out smoke, and there was impact damage to the center cargo hold. The crew continued, as briefed, and conducted an approach parallel to the ship, terminating between the foremast and forward kingpost. Over the forward

most cargo hold, the crew lowered the rescue swimmer, AWR2 Haisley, and subsequently departed the hover to conserve fuel and to continue assessing damage. Haisley signaled the helicopter to reapproach to lower a rescue litter for the injured mariner, who was brought out on deck by his crewmates. The helicopter was flown back into a hover over the spot for the litter to be lowered and then departed the hover once again.

Once ready for recovery, Haisley signaled for recovery. The helicopter was positioned in a steady fifteen-foot hover where the crew chief, AWR2 Zepeda, was able to lower the rescue hoist for recovery of the patient and rescue swimmer. With the cabin secure, the crew departed back to USS Philippine Sea, while both aircrewmen and the corpsman conducted life-saving measures, identifying the survivor's wounds and addressing them appropriately.

While the aircrew executed the recovery, the team aboard the Philippine Sea continued in parallel to evaluate alternatives to maximize the injured mariner's chances of survival. A nearby allied ship contained more complex medical capability and was rated for an MH-60R. AH703 then diverted to the allied ship, and successfully delivered the patient to the ship's medical staff for surgery. AH703 returned to Philippine Sea, but they would soon discover the excitement was not over.

The day prior to the Verbena rescue, M/V Tutor was targeted and hit by a Houthi Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) in the southern Red Sea, resulting in catastrophic damage to the vessel's propulsion system, rendering it inoperable and adrift at sea. The vessel remained within the Houthi weapons engagement zone, at risk of additional Houthi attacks with little to no notice. Before the celebration of the successful MEDEVAC from Verbena could commence, tasking was

already coming down to find a way to recover Tutor's 25 sailors, before she completely sank. Vessels passing through couldn't risk stopping to assist Tutor or risk the same fate. Taking a similar stance, USS Philippine Sea was directed to make best speed through the BAM, and minimize her time in the Houthi WEZ. The high speed of advance necessitated a recovery via helicopter and the distance from the rest of the strike group meant Philippine Sea was the only option. With less than 12 hours until execution, the crews of CEL-1, with the assistance of squadron and Air Wing planners onboard IKE, developed a daring plan to maximize the number of survivors rescued on each lift, requiring the CEL-1 maintenance team to strip any and all unnecessary equipment from the helicopter cabin. The sonobuoy launcher, sensor operator's seat, rescue station seat, and all non-essential cabin gear was removed.

Another issue the crew discovered was the limitation of Tutor's helicopter pad. Like many merchant vessels, the pad was rated only to 4,000 lbs, a trivial amount compared to the MH-60R's 21,000+ lbs. The crews would be forced to hover for the rescues, putting them in the most disadvantageous energy state while in a hostile environment. With all the planning in place, the maintenance department running full steam through the night, and crews butting against crew rest, all that was left was to execute the next day.

With the cruise complete with the BAM transit, AH703 launched for the first of three trips at 1330, flowing northwest at a low altitude to remain undetected while in hostile airspace. Approximately 45 minutes later, the crew arrived on scene and evaluated the situation. The ship was squatting at a 3° angle due to the flooding from the USV explosion against the hull at the waterline. After multiple reconnaissance orbits, the crew conducted a starboard to port approach to a 30-foot hover to lower the rescue aircrewman, AWR2 Haisley, and subsequently departed. Haisley found the ship's crew and briefed them on the plan of operations and gathered eight survivors to potentially be rescued on the first trip. Once he began moving towards the helicopter deck, AH703 conducted an approach port to starboard for better winds. The crew chief, AWR2 Zepeda, lowered the rescue basket on the hoist, which was received and handled by Haisley, who then signaled the first survivor onto the helicopter deck for loading into the basket. Zepeda raised the basket into the cabin, unloaded the survivor, and returned the basket to the deck. This was repeated until the cabin was full of seven survivors.

At this time, jets from CVW-3 onboard IKE noted numerous possible Houthi small boats inbound to the vessel, placing the crew of AH703 and especially the aircrewman left on deck at great risk. Through coordination with the IKE and her airborne assets, these boats were forced to turn away, allowing the recovery operation to proceed undisturbed.

The hoisting operations continued with subsequent survivors until the fourth survivor. While expected with added survivor weight, power margins developed into a concern. Rated at a .91 with .90 being the limit, the #2 engine reached its 2.5-minute temperature limit while in a 10 foot hover; an issue considering each hoist was taking around two minutes. The risk of exceeding temperature limits and potential loss of an engine quickly drew the crew's focus. Using ground effect to their advantage, the crew lowered their hover to decrease power required. Once the temperature lowered enough and the timer reset back to within the 30 minute temperature limit, LT Michael raised back up to a 10 foot hover to support hoisting operations. The crew continued hoisting survivors in this manner until full with nine personnel in the cabin, seven survivors and the two rescue crewmen. The survivors also relayed that one of the mariners had already died aboard Tutor, and was unreachable leaving the follow-on crews to bring back the 17 remaining survivors.

After the first sortie, the crew swapped out. LT Catherine "Timber" Wood replaced the copilot, LT Michael "FEMA" Sellers took over as the Aircraft Commander, and AWR2 Dille for AWR2 Haisley as the rescue crewman. The second crew launched from Philippine Sea at 1535 and transited for 20 minutes before arriving on scene, then conducted their own site evaluation. AWR2 Dille was lowered, and the airborne crew departed to conserve fuel while he briefed and prepped the survivors. Thanks to the turnover from the previous crew, the new crew already knew that after a few survivors were aboard the helicopter, they would have to reduce their hover to keep the #2 engine within its operating limitations. Seven survivors were recovered and shuttled back to Philippine Sea. At that time, it was confirmed that a coalition helicopter would be able to assist with the rescue, however, based on its size, it could only take three survivors. The assistance was hugely welcomed as it meant the crew of 703 wouldn't have to maintain the same harrowing hover into the night. With the cruiser much closer to Tutor now, the crew elected to fuel only to 2800 lbs, further reducing power required for the hover. AH703 took off for its last sortie at 1700 and arrived back at M/V Tutor minutes later. After waiting for the coalition helicopter to complete their rescue, AH703 recovered the last seven mariners. Upon completion of hoisting the stranded mariners, AWR2 Dille hoisted an additional two bags that were left behind, keepsakes for the family of the deceased mariner. Shortly after, AH703 departed from Tutor, and landed on Philippine Sea, disembarking the remaining survivors and shutting down just prior to sunset.

These two days of a rapidly changing situation in a combat environment proved the absolute necessity to maintain a flexible mindset, as well as constant, thorough communication to rapidly adapt to the situation. Creative thinking on a short timeline allowed for a rapid and unorthodox reconfiguration of the MH-60R to affect the largest rescue in HSM history. With CRM extending well beyond the cockpit, proactive planning and assistance from the carrier helped craft a plan, and the teamwork between all the forces in the area ultimately resulted in saving 25 lives over the course of 18 hours.

Screaming Into the Void for 8 Months

By LT Jessie "SAS" Fromularo, USN

When told that HSM-49 would be the first to ever deploy a Romeo detachment on a Dock Landing Ship (LHD), the expectation of being "first" seemed like an exciting step for the HSM Community. The reality is that when you are the first to do something, it often involves failure and multiple tries before getting it right. This deployment instead was poised to become a jumping off point for further innovation; to see what worked and what definitely didn't. In that respect, this first MH-60R deployment on an LHD fits the description of a "first" very well.

Originally slated for the 7th Fleet AOR, it made sense to include a flexible ASW asset with an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). The expectation that USS Makin Island (LHD 8) would be operating in straits, seas, and around contested artificial islands set the stage for tense encounters. When the ARG was then switched to 5th Fleet, things felt less urgent. Instead of staying in the South China Sea, we transited through it, which pointed out the first schism in the ARG's operations that runs counter to Romeo operations. The impression given by the ship was that the real work starts when it gets to the operating area and can unload ground forces at a moment's notice, discounting the significance of transiting for months at a time through contentious waters. Radar on a ship may have previously been sufficient in ensuring complete situational awareness of the operating area, but the next frontier of naval dominance is going to be encompassing a much farther distance and prolific submarines. Some would argue that we are already at that point. LCDR Francisco Alonso, HSM 49 Detachment Three OIC, put it, "ASW is an ever-present threat and having the Romeo on board allows the ARG to move more freely in an ASW environment." The ship did not utilize the detachment with that in mind. Radar will always have its limitations, and the ability of an ARG to send airborne radar to gain a larger surface picture is vital when considering the long-range missile threats that are starting to be commonplace. As LT Alex McKenna, LHD 8's Mini Boss said, "The Romeos bring SUW [capabilities] as well, other than the F-35s which don't have the legs for long flights and take up the whole deck for launch. The Romeo can more easily work with other assets while taking up only one spot." The Romeo offers flexibility and more long-term coverage for over-the-horizon radar that is currently not organic to the ARG.

When it came to integrating the operating capabilities of the Romeo with the ship, there were many snafus, primarily based on systems compatibility. Romeos are accustomed to having Datalink and an Anti-Submarine/Surface Tactical Air Controller (ASTAC) to directly communicate with the ship. The ability to give live feed of the Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) and other systems should not be discounted. The way the ship flexed was to have an operator at a Link 16 display who would task us, albeit rarely. Without a rapport with the ship's operator, our operating capabilities got reduced to that of a mall cop instead of the patrolman we are used to being. Additionally, they were not trained to operate with us, and despite efforts made on both sides to improve radio transmissions and tasking, there were often tactical and operational elements missing that led to miscommunications or tasking beyond our abilities. If they had a better understanding of how to task us and what our capabilities were, we could have been a better asset to the ship.

USS Makin Island (LHD-8) departs Naval Base San Diego. **U.S. Navy photo by Chief Mass Communication Specialist John Lill.**

Though working Link 16 with the other air platforms was stilted, being on the LHD allowed us to carve out more space with the All Dominion Reconnaissance (ADR). We were able to test our abilities in what kind of messages we could send to each other as well as how airborne radar could help their operations. The MH-60R was invaluable with coastal and island surveillance and we were able to create a symbiotic relationship that became commonplace in our operations. Collection operations were expanded on both sides as well as highlighting a possible role for the Romeo integrating with the Marine ground forces aboard LHD 8. An Intelligence

Officer with the 15th MEU Expeditionary Unit agreed saying, "With the deployment, the MEU Intelligence Detachment and HSM-49 showed interoperability in support of domain awareness heretofore unavailable to us." Alonso added that there were "positives with the integration aspect with the radio battalions for collections missions, the recon for VBSS, and the integration with the ACE (Aviation Combat Element)."

Practical operating factors like deck space and maintenance space cannot be ignored. Being the newest platform meant that our needs were addressed last. The ten MV-22s took up most of the forward deck space and the six F-35s took the aft deck space. The Sierras brought their "standard loadout" for the LHD and had three aircraft, which made for a tight deck. All took up significant hangar space and created a crunch on maintainers' spaces as well. Without a dedicated space like the other assets on the boat, our 25 maintainers were working out of 120 square feet and hangar space was being haggled for like figs at a Turkish market to try and get everyone what they needed. The ACE was not willing to reduce the number of aircraft they were taking, despite the addition of two Romeos. Alonso said, "There is vast potential for growth if the ACE took less aircraft. Three to four [MH-60R] aircraft would be ideal." There were unexpected additions to the Romeos' role on the deployment, specifically having to fill in for the HSC aircraft for both Plane Guard and VERTREP on multiple occasions. McKenna said, "They offered backup to the HSC Community, which was positive in more aspects than anticipated, such as logistics and SAR." This reinforces Alonso's conclusion that by putting more Romeos on the LHD, and reducing the footprint of other airframes, one could cover more mission sets with the same amount of hangar and deck space while still deconflicting with other embarked aircraft.

So, was this first deployment a success? Is it worth it to continue to deploy MH-60Rs with LHDs? McKenna put it well when he said, "It's a small footprint that brings that added benefit of an asset that is not normally with an ARG. The OTH capability and the ASW capability could be something that the ARG gets used to using, [whereas] they are new and untapped at this point." Based on the capabilities that no organic asset can currently give to the ARG, it seems a no-brainer to continue forward utilizing Romeos on LHDs, but there needs to be flexibility in how they integrate with the ACE and the ARG as a whole. McKenna added, "The Romeo still takes a back seat to other missions, and the ACE needs to realize that even though they consider [the Romeo] just doing SSC, it is an actual mission that gets eyes out there versus the unit level training that the ACE prioritizes." Alonso concurred saying, "Integration requires flexibility in planning. Their command relationships are structured differently; therefore, their priorities are set differently." As for being a success, success comes from the ability to learn from the pitfalls and positives and to have both the Romeo Community and the ARG/MEU meet each other halfway to continue to grow with the changing threats that require flexibility and innovation to meet.

A CEL OIC's Introduction to Combat at Sea

By LCDR Lisa Amble, USN, HSM-74, CEL-3 OIC

"VAMPIRE inbound, brace for shock," echoed throughout the ship as USS Gravely (DDG 107) transited through the Bab al-Mandeb (BAM) Strait yet again. Sailors moved toward the non-threat side of the ship as the roar of Standard Missile launches could be heard from the forward and aft Vertical Launching Systems (VLS). These sounds were the new normal for the destroyers in Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2's 2023-2024 Fifth Fleet deployment in the Red Sea. Once the first salvo launched, one could feel the collective heartbeat of the ship as everyone held their breath in anticipation. The Sailors outside of the Combat Information Center (CIC) waited for either another salvo of missiles or the sound of Captain Sanchez's voice informing the crew that Team Gravely defeated another inbound anti-ship ballistic/cruise missile (ASBM/ASCM) or unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). Inside CIC, an intense series of calls among watch stations were funneled to the Tactical Action Officer (TAO) and Captain with hostile track updates and the status of inbound missiles. This was the new normal for the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower Strike Group with its newfound participation in Operation Prosperity Guardian. This was the introduction to my Department Head tour.

I arrived at HSM-74 less than one month prior to deployment and had been told I would be the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of Combat Element Three. "Okay, sweet, fire hose effect - Navy tradition," I thought. Based on timing, I joined HSM-74 after the squadron completed work ups, and I had only completed the refresher syllabus at the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS). The promises of European port visits and a simple deployment, mostly in the Mediterranean, sounded like everything a helicopter pilot could ask for at this point.

On the night of December 30th, 2023, my Combat Element found itself not in the Mediterranean, but in the Red Sea. I was about to go to sleep but heard an unsettling sound…the roar of Standard Missiles leaving VLS. In the chaotic rush to CIC, my roommate and I nearly collided. The USS Gravely had just intercepted two ASBMs and settled into an uneasy calm. A few hours later, I stood in CIC and listened to my helicopter crews taking fire from manned Houthi small boats attempting to board a merchant vessel. It was not going to be the Mediterranean cruise for which I had hoped.

The next radio call I heard was, "AMBUSH, TARGET, FOUR HOUTHI SMALL BOATS," followed by "AMBUSH 706, RIFLE." Our crews returned fire in both self-defense and response to a formal order. It was the first use of a HELLFIRE in response to aggression in U.S. Navy history. One week later, we were called upon to launch our alert aircraft following a BAM transit while USS Gravely, USS Mason (DDG 87), and an allied ship defended against 30+ One-Way Attack (OWA) UAVs, two ASBMs, and an ASCM with standard missiles and 5 inch guns.

It was a beautiful cacophony as ships launched ordnance, dynamically maneuvering in the choppy waters. My team pulled an aircraft onto the flight deck, loaded ordnance, and prepared for launch. After a 12-degree roll, water washed over the flight deck as the ship turned, submerging the LSO shack. Another call from CIC came over the headset, "Shooting!"

"Get inside! They're about to shoot!" I motioned for everyone on the flight deck to get inside the skin of the ship. SM-2s roared overhead and smoke filled the hangar. After the missiles left and it seemed like a second salvo was not imminent, the team ran out to the exposed flight deck and continued to ready the aircraft. Illuminated in the night sky, you could see a drone on fire falling nearby and a fellow destroyer enveloped in smoke with occasional missiles launching from their VLS. We digested this new reality and quickly adapted to and operated in it. There would be several more missile and drone engagements in the coming months, and tensions would remain unchanged.

Typically, the Navy has brought the fight to the enemy. This time, the enemy brought the fight to the sea in the form of anti-ship missiles, explosive UAVs, and manned and Unmanned Surface Vessels (USV). These events and tactics used in the first few weeks of my Department Head tour marked not only an operational shift, but perhaps a mindset shift, unlike anything the Navy had employed in recent history.

Combat Mindset - Changing Philosophy

The Navy has maintained a major presence in various theaters, ensuring the freedom of navigation and playing a supporting role in various conflicts. In October 2016, USS Mason encountered one week filled with Houthi-launched anti-ship missiles. The ship responded with Nulka, SM-2s, and Evolved Sea-Sparrow Missiles (ESSM)[1]. However, this regional conflict intensified in October 2023, when USS Carney was attacked by several anti-ship missiles and UAVs following the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel.

As a naval force, we trained with the mentality that the only time we would employ these tactics would be against a near-peer competitor. Ike's 2023-24 deployment disproved this mindset. Naval leaders must stop perceiving that wars and conflicts are fought in-country and inland with the Navy as a supporting and striking role. Instead, we must ensure we are training for a war fought at sea in close quarters with a 360 degree threat axis.

Thus, we must better integrate our surface and air forces, and question how we preserve combat power. Ships must evolve their understanding of "fight the ship," to include the layered capability of Naval Aviation. Additionally, we must incorporate the lessons of the Red Sea:

1. Determining processes during ship self-defense engagements is undoubtedly essential to layered defense. In that same vein, helicopters are an essential element of that layered defense.

2. First off deck often equated to the only asset off deck. Missing a launch meant an unacceptable coverage gap that exposed the whole CSG to more risk. Our Sailors knew the why behind their work and our pilots knew the absolute limits of the aircraft to enable continuous coverage.

3. At the unit level, curating combat-minded Sailors was as critical as maintaining their morale and resilience. Combat pilots and combat maintainers are more than just Sailors who operate in a combat environment; they are professionals who understand the right way to do the job is NOW. Sustained combat does not give us time to catch up or pause for safety.

4. The fog of war does not allow for selective scheduling; it requires the right habit-patterns. Within the CELs and squadron as a whole, we treated our mistakes as golden opportunities to identify our seams in these habit patterns and LEARN.

Build your Habits

The U.S. Navy has been operating in a "peacetime" environment where pirates, drug smugglers, or the occasional small boat have been the Navy's most common at-sea interactions. Now, the number of destroyers that have had to defend themselves with NULKA, CIWS, ESSM, 5-inch guns, and Standard Missiles continues to grow as other Strike Groups have entered the Red Sea theater.

In total, the Ike CSG defeated dozens of anti-ship missiles, 150+ UAVs, and several small manned and unmanned vessels, while conducting strikes in-land to degrade Houthi capabilities in an effort to maintain freedom of navigation through the Red Sea. From a rotary wing perspective, the HSM Community logged the first naval rotary-wing HELLFIRE engagement, rescued 26 mariners, and provided round-the-clock coverage for the entire CSG and our allies, in addition to the countless CSAR alerts and MEDEVAC sorties conducted by our HSC sister squadron.

Fatigue exposes our habit patterns and combat is not the time to discover that these habit patterns are flawed. Build yours before going over the horizon.

HSM-74 Combat Element 3 (CEL) Crew

Footnotes

1. https://news.usni.org/2016/10/11/uss-mason-fired-3-missiles-to-defend-from-yemen-cruise-missiles-attack.

The CMV-22B is at the Core of Modern Naval Operations

By CAPT Chris "chet" Misner, USN (Ret.)
Senior Manager, Strategic Pursuits (DoN)

A CMV-22B Osprey assigned to VRM-30 takes flight during a functional check flight on Naval Air Station North Island, Calif. **U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Samantha P. Montenegro.**

The U.S. National Defense Strategy prioritizes the Indo-Pacific as a critical theater for national security. Yet, the current U.S. Navy Fleet would struggle to meet the logistical demands of the Joint Force across the vast maritime distances involved in prolonged combat operations within this area.

One reason is that the U.S. Department of Defense's approved and funded procurement programs do not meet the demand for airborne logistics in maritime combat. This creates a significant gap in the Navy's ability to support Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) and Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations (EABO).

The Navy must ensure it has the logistics capability to support the growing number of deployed naval and air forces operating from sea and shore-based hubs. This will not only ensure the Navy meets immediate and long-term needs but also strengthen the U.S. defense industrial base.

The U.S. Navy has historically projected power through carrier strike groups, concentrating firepower on a few assets, typically including an aircraft carrier, destroyers, frigates, and submarines. While powerful, this offensive operation model enables adversaries to anticipate U.S. naval movements, limits Sailors' ability to respond to threats across long distances, and exposes Fleets to anti-access/anti-denial (A2/D2) threats.

As a result, the U.S. Navy is shifting from large, centralized carrier strike groups to distributed maritime operations, which disperse naval units over a larger area to complicate enemy targeting. This shift requires not only advanced combat capabilities but also flexible logistics support.

The CMV-22B Osprey – a tiltrotor aircraft – is at the heart of this transformation in the Navy's approach. The CMV-22B offers superior range, avionics, and communications compared to the C-2A, its predecessor.

Although it was initially conceived as a carrier-onboard-delivery (COD) replacement, the Osprey is not confined to large-deck carrier logistics. The CMV-22B can conduct long-range navigation in order to deliver logistical support across entire Fleets, an advantage in distributed maritime environments where logistics needs span vast areas and diverse units.

Carrier strike group operations today can cover over seven hundred miles in 24 hours. The CMV-22B ensures logistics support matches this pace, crucial for distributed maritime operations in contested environments. The aircraft can rapidly transport personnel, munitions, medical supplies, and components to Expeditionary Advanced Bases, Forward Logistic Support Sites, and ships at sea.

The CMV-22B also allows the U.S. military to lead joint combat operations, integrating capabilities across service branches. It assists the convergence of the U.S. Navy's distributed operations with the Air Force's agile combat employment and the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO). The aircraft's speed, range, and versatility ensure the Navy operates effectively as part of a modular force comprising air and ground elements.

The Osprey– used by the Navy, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Marine Corps – has evolved over time to meet the needs of our warfighters. Looking ahead, the CMV-22B presents opportunities beyond its primary logistics role. The Navy could leverage its versatility to support the Carrier Strike Group with aerial refueling capability. Its enhanced secure, long-range communication could better support Naval Special Warfare (NSW) forces in combat search and rescue (CSAR) and other NSW missions. These and other improvements would expand its strategic value to the U.S. Navy Fleet and Joint Force.

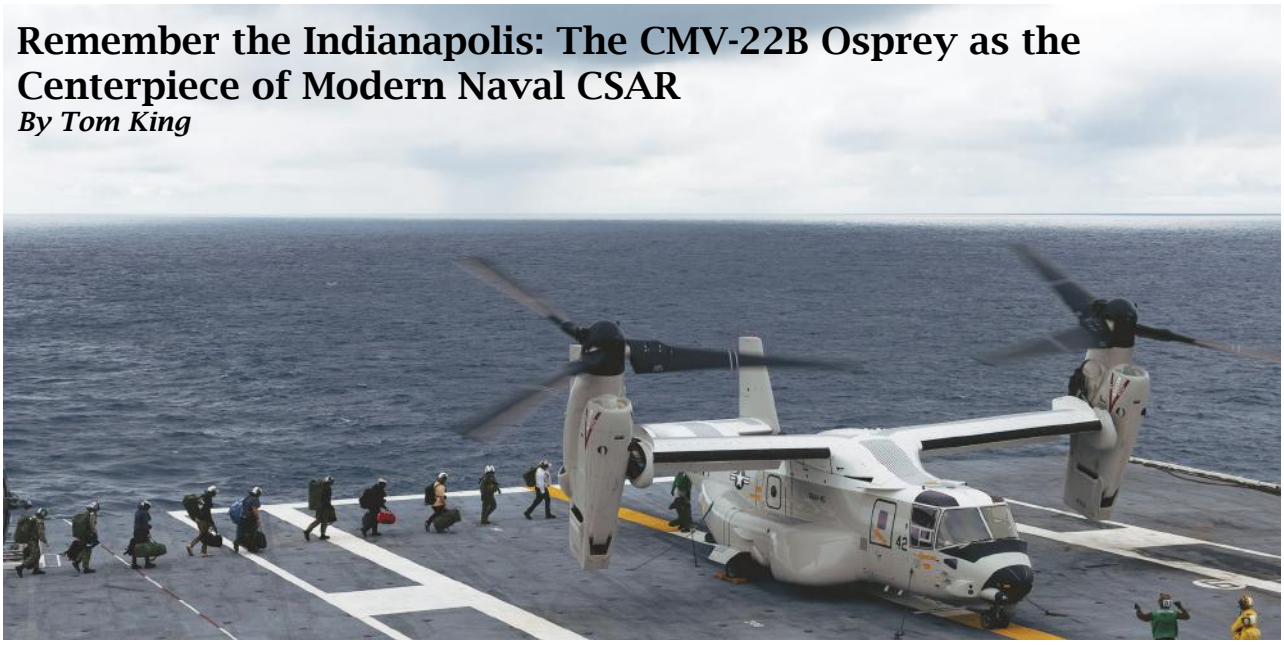
Furthermore, procuring the CMV-22B and investing in its readiness and modernization are not only necessary to meet operational needs, but also to sustain and strengthen the U.S. defense industrial base. Team Osprey, a consortium of over five hundred manufacturers and suppliers spanning nearly every U.S. state, supports jobs producing thousands of essential parts for the Osprey. This industrial base is vital to maintain American military and economic strength.

U.S. naval capabilities may not reach their full potential without a fast, long-range tiltrotor aircraft like the CMV-22B. Indeed, its ability to support both Fleet and Joint Force operations while enhancing combat capabilities makes it a key asset against emerging threats in contested environments.

The CMV-22's speed and range are critical as the Navy adapts to distributed maritime operations and develops tactics, techniques, and procedures to meet future threats.

Remember the Indianapolis: The CMV-22B Osprey as the Centerpiece of Modern Naval CSAR

By Tom King



Sailors board a CMV-22B Osprey, assigned to the "Mighty Bisons" of VRM-40, on the flight deck of USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78).

Anyone who has watched the movie *Jaws* knows of the fate of the crew of the USS Indianapolis. During the closing days of World War II, a Japanese submarine torpedoed and sank the heavy cruiser, which was returning from delivering the first atomic bomb to Tinian Island under great secrecy. Of 1,195 crew members aboard, 860 survived the initial sinking.

For four days, those men floated in the Pacific with almost no lifeboats, food or water, and faced increasingly horrific conditions, including swarming sharks. On the fourth day, a seaplane spotted the men in the water, and directed ships to help rescue the dwindling number of survivors, which by the end totaled a mere 317.

War planners must remember this history as tensions escalate in the vast Western Pacific. Should conflict erupt, one grim likelihood seems certain: American service members will find themselves in the water and in need of rescue, whether they are downed pilots or even the crew of a stricken U.S. naval vessel. Given the nature of distributed warfare at sea, they may find that help is not close at hand when they need it most.

To conduct successful distributed operations in a contested environment, the U.S. Navy will require an organic combat search and rescue capability that must possess speed, range, runway independence, and operational flexibility. Only a tiltrotor like the CMV-22B Osprey can provide all of these attributes. The U.S. Navy must prioritize the creation of concepts of operation and follow-on tactics, techniques, and procedures around the CMV-22B and the Combat Search and Rescue mission to ensure U.S. service members have the best possible chance of rescue at sea.

In the event of conflict with the People's Republic of China (PRC), U.S. air, naval, and ground forces will likely find themselves operating inside the PRC's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) envelope. That system involves layers of anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles, submarines, surface ships, fighters, bombers, and non-kinetic weapons and is designed to keep U.S. and allied warships at arm's length. In the most extreme example, the DF-26 "Guam Killer" Ballistic Missile is estimated to have a range of at least 4,000 km, capable of striking aircraft carriers or land bases within the South China Sea—or farther afield in the Pacific or Indian Oceans.

In that environment, slow-moving aircraft or ships with large radar signatures will be especially vulnerable. Ships could be disabled or sunk quickly and aircraft shot down in significant numbers as the United States and its allies attempt to counter a PRC attack against Taiwan, the Philippines, or another friendly country in the Western Pacific.

Imagine a U.S. carrier strike group facing off against Chinese warships near Taiwan. A sudden, coordinated assault—potentially involving torpedoes and anti-ship missiles launched from land, air, and sea—could cripple multiple vessels in minutes, as a famous wargame conducted by the Center for Strategic & International Studies has demonstrated. Even with the most advanced damage control, the speed and intensity of such an attack could overwhelm a ship's defenses, leaving hundreds of Sailors struggling for survival in the open water.

The challenges facing those adrift would be immense. Exposure, dehydration, injuries sustained during the attack, and psychological trauma could take a heavy toll. The experience of the crew of USS Indianapolis and countless

other U.S. Navy vessels lost during World War II gives us a glimpse of their plight.

Given this stark reality, the United States must examine the forces it has today and determine which platforms have the capabilities that are best suited for Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR). Modern CSAR demands speed, range, and the ability to operate in contested environments.

The CMV-22B is ideally suited for the CSAR role because of the inherent advantages of speed and range it enjoys over the traditional helicopters, with a cruising speed of 250 knots, and a range of 1150 nm. While the CMV-22B is intended primarily to carry out Carrier Onboard Delivery (COD) missions as a replacement for the aging fleet of fixed-wing C-2 Greyhounds, it can also be adapted to the CSAR role when needed, supplementing or even replacing current CSAR helicopters.

The CMV-22B's unique tiltrotor capabilities enable it to take off, hover and land like a helicopter. However, it can also fly horizontally at high speed and long range like a fixed-wing aircraft.

The speed of the CMV-22B can provide commanders with faster recovery, which increases the chances of injured personnel receiving medical aid during the so-called "Golden Hour"—the critical window of time after traumatic injury when medical interventions have the highest rate of success. The speed of the tiltrotor also reduces the likelihood that an adversary captures downed aircrew or Sailors before friendly forces can arrive. The U.S. Air Force has ably demonstrated the tiltrotor's effectiveness in the CSAR role with their CV-22 Osprey variant.

The versatility of the CMV-22B means it can operate from a variety of platforms, from flat-deck aircraft carriers and amphibious assault ships to smaller aviation-capable vessels. The CMV-22B also benefits from not being limited to a launch catapult like most fixed-wing aircraft, allowing it to operate from a variety of naval vessels, and it has aerial refueling capability as well, essentially giving it unlimited range.

Some have advocated for resurrecting seaplanes for the CSAR role, but they have significant limitations. During World War II, seaplanes were all the Navy had and were naturally commonplace, with an entire ecosystem built around seaplane support and sustainment, including dedicated seaplane tenders spread throughout the Fleet.

However, none of the Navy's seaplane infrastructure exists any longer and would have to be rebuilt from scratch. As the Navy increasingly adopted rotorcraft, seaplanes dwindled due to their inferior mission flexibility and capability.

Seaplane operations are heavily dependent on sea state and weather conditions. Rough seas can make takeoff and landing extremely dangerous, if not impossible. In a combat environment, where time is of the essence, such limitations could prove fatal. Indeed, in the case of the USS Indianapolis, seaplanes were specifically ordered not to land near the survivors, and the one that did was unable to take off again.

In a modern USS Indianapolis disaster scenario, multiple CMV-22Bs could fly in low, swiftly converge on the site, drop aid and hoist survivors, then ferry them to safety without risk to more ships, irrespective of sea state.

The CMV-22B is very simply the best-suited, most capable platform for the CSAR mission in the Indo-Pacific. The program of record for the Navy is set to procure 48 CMV-22Bs, but war planners should think long and hard as to whether that number will be enough.

Moreover, effective CSAR is not just about having the right equipment; it's about training and practice. The Navy must prioritize the development and implementation of robust CMV-22B-based CSAR Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs). Regular exercises involving CSAR units, fixed-wing pilots, and surface navy personnel are essential to ensure that everyone knows their role and can execute it effectively under pressure.

Sailors and aviators need to have the confidence that no matter how risky the mission inside the Chinese A2/AD environment, they have a reasonable chance of rescue if they end up in the water. Likewise, their commanders need to know the resources and tools are in place to affect a rescue before they order Sailors and aviators into harm's way. Without confidence in CSAR capabilities, the Navy's ability to conduct combat operations will be limited.

America has not had to conduct large-scale CSAR operations in a contested maritime environment since World War II. It is essential to start preparations now, including developing the necessary TTPs, investing in the right equipment, and conducting regular training exercises.

The USS Indianapolis disaster serves as a constant reminder of the stakes involved. The Navy should anticipate the need to conduct mass rescue in the Pacific. The Navy needs to be planning for that contingency now, with the CMV-22B as the centerpiece of its approach.

About the Author

Tom King is a former CSAR-qualified naval aircrewman and rescue swimmer. Originally published in The MOC (Maritime Operations Center) and used with permission. https://centerformaritimestrategy.org/publications/remember-the-indianapolis-the-cmv-22b-osprey-as-the-centerpiece-of-modern-naval-csar/

Improving Aviation Maintenance Efficiency: Enhancing Mission Readiness through Closed-Loop Detailing

By CDR Christopher Pratt, USN, Commanding Officer, VRM-50

While the complexity of naval aircraft continues to rapidly increase and advancements, like machine learning, are exponentially accelerating our technological capabilities, our aviation maintenance manning, training, and detailing processes have maintained the status quo. Adjusting the Navy's detailing process to allow closed-loop detailing for specific aviation maintenance professionals—where personnel remain within a single community, platform, or type command throughout the majority of their career—would optimize maintenance efficiency by leveraging the experience of critical skill sets, directly improving aircraft availability and enhancing mission readiness.

Background

The Navy's current detailing process for aviation maintenance personnel creates avoidable skill gaps and readiness challenges for specialized fields. Currently, a Sailor in most enlisted aviation ratings can be detailed to any squadron or unit within the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE). An unqualified aviation Sailor may show up to a squadron and spend nearly half their tour working toward full qualification, only to later be detailed to a unit in a different community where they begin the qualification process again. The return on investment could be maximized if a Sailor's Navy Enlisted Classification (NECs) and qualifications were able to be rapidly reutilized on subsequent tours.

Our professional aviation maintenance Officers—Limited Duty Officers (LDOs), Chief Warrant Officers (CWOs), and Aviation Maintenance Duty Officers (AMDOs)—face similar hurdles when changing platforms (Type/Model/Series aircraft), as they receive no additional training during the transition. They could have spent the previous 25 years learning to be a professional maintenance officer on the MH-60, only to be asked to lead a maintenance department for the CMV-22B without going through any formalized training syllabus to learn the new platform. It is assumed that overall maintenance experience and knowledge of Naval Aviation maintenance programs will translate to expertise across platforms. Both broadening leadership acumen and continually refining technical competency should be equally valued in the Navy's leadership development model.

Navy instructions exist to support the potential utilization of closed-loop detailing. The Naval Military Personnel Manual Article on the Enlisted Distribution Management System (MILPERSMAN 1306-100) describes a closed-loop NEC distributable community as a "rating or group of ratings sharing a common occupational skill in which the Sailor has earned a highly specialized talent within Sailor's general rating

Aviation Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Kyaw Htat signals to a CMV-22B Osprey assigned to Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron (VRM) 50. **U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Chelsea D. Meiller.**

experience." It can be argued that a fully qualified maintenance professional trained to maintain the V-22 Osprey, the world's only mass-produced tiltrotor aircraft, or a fifth generation fighter like the F-35 Lighting II, should be considered a highly specialized talent.

The ability to predict success should always be a prerequisite before attempting to institutionalize any process change of this magnitude. In a 2020 Naval Postgraduate School study that explored maintainer experience and aviation readiness, the authors used causal forecasting models to determine "the existence of a significant positive correlation between experience and readiness." In a 2018 Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) study, the author looked at relationships between mishaps and manning, finding "a correlation (with a 95 percent confidence level) between mishap probability and supervisor fit percentage." Modeling seems to indicate that ameliorating maintenance experience would both improve readiness and decrease mishaps.

Potential Benefits

The primary benefit of closed-loop detailing is to allow personnel to deepen their knowledge and skill sets within their specific role or platform. In addition to enhancing expertise and specialization, closed-loop detailing could reduce training costs and time, maintain operational continuity, and help better retain institutional knowledge.

Reduce Training Costs/Time.

Reducing or eliminating tours across platforms equates to less time spent on retraining or familiarization with new systems. One way the Oxford English Dictionary defines "efficiency" is, "the ratio of the useful work performed by a machine [or person] in a process to the total energy [or time] expended." By alleviating the need to dedicate time to additional training, the Navy benefits by utilizing that time to perform useful work. In another CNA study on NEC Utilization, the author notes that the total cost of our current detailing process "is underestimated because it includes neither the cost of the schoolhouse nor the opportunity cost of members being retrained vice working in a productive job." The value proposition of NEC reutilization through closed-loop detailing comes primarily in the form of a more highly-skilled workforce, increased aircraft availability, and enhanced mission readiness—all of which can be quantified and measured. The Navy currently tracks experience, aircraft availability, and mission readiness through the collection of Aviation Maintenance Experience (AMEX), Mission Capable Aircraft Readiness (MCAR), and Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS) data.

Operational Continuity

Personnel familiarity and stability improve teamwork and operational effectiveness, which is especially critical for working on highly-complex platforms or technical missions requiring deep expertise. By maintaining operational continuity, squadrons can enhance collaboration, maintain a sense of organizational identity, and build on a culture of pride in ownership. If an individual expects that they will be responsible for managing a task/process/mission in perpetuity, they will be more invested in improving that task/process/mission immediately.

Retain Institutional Knowledge

Keeping Sailors in a community aids in the preservation of vital lessons learned and the pass down of best practices—helping to avoid repeating past mistakes. By capturing and sharing institutional knowledge, it allows Sailors to become true Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and encourages innovation as they continue to build on existing knowledge. Experienced Sailors are also more adept at providing unique insights into recurring challenges which may prevent costly mistakes, as they are more likely to be aware of past issues and their solutions. Retaining institutional knowledge also benefits the training and mentorship process, allowing those experienced Sailors to safeguard a unit from losing its intellectual capital.

In a fiscally constrained environment with a dearth of active duty manpower, the proposed detailing process change comes at no additional monetary costs and requires no additional people, but augurs well for increasing combat readiness.

Potential Challenges

Closed-loop detailing is not a panacea that comes without risk. Changing the current detailing process could adversely impact career flexibility, limit promotion opportunities, further complicate sea-shore rotations, and have unforeseen retention risks. Navy detailing is an exceedingly difficult task—Detailers delicately balance several, sometimes competing, interests to include: PCS costs, training costs, sea-shore rotations, career progression, homesteading, spousal co-location, and special needs. However, in a highly technical, skill-based profession like Naval Aviation, it is difficult to look past the inefficiencies in our current detailing process and not see the need for change.

Career Flexibility

Some Sailors may desire to change platforms during their careers for personal, familial, or other reasons. Fortunately, the Navy already has a codified lateral transfer process that is utilized for Unrestricted Line (URL) Officers and certain Enlisted rates like Naval Aircrewman. Lateral transfer boards are closely managed by BUPERS-3 to ensure equitable manning health is maintained across communities. In fact, URL Officers are not allowed to request lateral transfers until "within 6 months of completing obligated service in the present community as a result of functional training received." The Navy recognizes the merit of retaining URL Officer training and experience within a type command or community but has largely overlooked that potential value for our aviation maintenance professionals.

Promotion Opportunities

Promotion opportunities are heavily influenced by community values, rate ladders, and promotion board precepts—all things that can be shaped internally by the Navy to meet evolving operational needs. Policies to mitigate potential downsides, such as periodic broadening tours or leadership development paths should continue to be leveraged in order to cultivate well-rounded Naval leaders.

Sea-Shore Rotation

Detailing within a singular community would likely restrict the diversity of potential geographic locations for follow-on tours. This could be seen as a negative for some, but could also be seen as a benefit for those desiring geographic stability. There may also be less flexibility in rotation timing and job availability simply because there are fewer positions to fill when narrowing the scope to a single community. However, closed-loop detailing within the NAE has proven to be compatible with the standard sea-shore rotation for Naval Aviators/Flight Officers and Enlisted Aircrewmen. Although challenging, the same process could prove possible for select aviation maintenance professionals.

Retention Risks

By retaining personnel in a community, there is the potential for job burnout due to lack of variety in assignments or daily tasks. Sailors have become accustomed to being the jack-of-all trades, and closed-loop detailing would certainly result in a culture change. Skill-diversity and skill-mastery both have their merits and both have potential for burnout. In an occupation as dynamic and dangerous as the profession-of-arms, it is imperative that every individual seek mastery in their respective craft. In his book Outliers, bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell popularized the idea that "10,000 hours" of guided practice is what is required, at a minimum, to achieve mastery. Mastery comes with experience, and experience comes with time and repetition.

Recommendations for Implementation

To implement closed-loop detailing in a pragmatic way, the Navy should employ the scientific method and start the experimental phase with a relatively small sample set. The Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission (VRM) Community could serve as the perfect prototype for a pilot program. The V-22 Osprey is one of the most unique, dynamic, and complicated aircraft in the DoD inventory. As a brand new community, VRM desperately needs to build the depth of maintenance experience that other, more established, communities rely on to maintain high aircraft readiness rates. The VRM Community is also small - with only three squadrons and a total of approximately 1,000 active duty Sailors. Changing the detailing process within the community will have limited effects on the greater Navy manning. Within this small community, the Navy could start with the DEMOT rates - Aviation Machinist's Mate (AD), Aviation Electrician's Mate (AE), Aviation Structural Mechanic/Safety Equipment (AM/AME), Aviation Ordnanceman (AO), and Aviation Electronics Technician (AT). As previously noted, a practical way to measure the efficacy could be to use existing Navy readiness tools to compare current AMEX, MCAR, and DRRS data to future numbers after implementing detailing changes.

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy, described contested logistics and strategic sealift capabilities as "one of our highest modernization priorities." In terms of great power competition, improving VRM mission readiness equates to a greater reliability and availability of combat logistics support to the Fleet in contested environments. If improved readiness rates and efficiencies are proven from the VRM model, it could be expanded to keep maintenance professionals within the same Type/Model, for example, retaining Sailors within the MH-60 Community (R/S) or the F-18 Community (E/F/G).

Conclusion

The Navy has long touted its people as its most valued asset, and rightfully so—U.S. Navy Sailors are a team of extremely resourceful, talented, and motivated individuals. By rotating aviation maintenance professionals between dissimilar platforms they are consistently expected to spend precious time learning new and increasingly complex airframes instead of honing their skills on platforms they already know. As a result of an antiquated detailing process, the Navy is not realizing the greatest benefits of its most valued assets—the people. The Navy should explore how maintaining platform continuity in the assignment of aviation maintenance professionals can increase aircraft availability, enhance expertise, and improve overall mission readiness. Highly-specialized maintenance professionals are necessary to maintain highly-specialized aircraft in order to maximize the combat effectiveness of naval air power!

Enhancing Naval Combat Readiness: The Critical Role of Air Warfare Officers

By CDR Peter "Corumbo" Kowalcyk, USN and CDR Michael "Romeo" Rogers, USN

Air Warfare Officers (AWOs) are air battle managers (ABM) detailed from the E-2 Hawkeye Community to provide the Air and Missile Defense Commander (AMDC) with air defense expertise, levying experience from their prior tours aboard aircraft carriers and working with carrier air wing staffs. As designated Naval Flight Officers, AWOs have completed flight training at NAS Pensacola, E-2 Hawkeye Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) training, qualified as ABM Mission Commanders during their first sea tour, and completed a competitive shore duty such as FRS ABM Instructor. An AWO typically has over ten years of E-2 Hawkeye experience prior to being detailed as an AWO.

AWOs embark on the AMDC ship from the start of Surface Warfare Advanced Tactical Training (SWATT) through deployment. The AWO's E-2 Hawkeye background augments the already high-performing AMDC ship's combat team, comprised of senior surface warfare officer department heads, limited duty officers, chief warrant officers, and senior enlisted subject matter experts in air and missile defense tactics.

In addition to their planning roles, AWOs can train and qualify as Force Anti-Air Warfare Coordinators (FAAWCs) to supplement the AMDC watch teams. Most AWOs will join the AMDC team by Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX), but the Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center (SMWDC) strives to pair AWOs as early as possible to build rapport and grow with their shipboard team. CDR Peter "Corumbo" Kowalcyk, CDR Michael "Romeo" Rogers, and LCDR Timothy "Fun Size" Lloyd recently deployed with their AMDC ship and were force multipliers who significantly enhanced the air defense capability across their strike groups.

During the onset of hostilities in the Red Sea, CDR Kowalcyk, embarked aboard USS Philippine Sea (CG 58), was instrumental in streamlining and enhancing the kill chain for the Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group (IKECSG). His collaboration with U.S. Central Command in the Red Sea optimized the force's air defense posture, enabling U.S. and coalition vessels to effectively engage incoming Houthi threats against both maritime forces and global trade routes. His presence significantly increased the lethality and efficiency of the AMDC for the CSG, as well as the Combatant Commander's Sector Air Defense.

Similarly, CDR Rogers provided the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group (TRCSG) with comparable expertise and leadership across both the 7th and 5th Fleet areas of responsibility. His efforts integrated 18 U.S. and coalition vessels into the CSG air defense structure, enabling dynamic operations in the 7th Fleet. Rogers and Kowalcyk executed a seamless turnover of air defense responsibilities between their respective CSGs during operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

CDR Peter "Corumbo" Kowalcyk and CDR Michael "Romeo" Rogers

In addition to their operational contributions, AWOs are vital in post-deployment readiness training. Rogers provided specialized training to the USS Daniel Inouye (DDG 118), a Flight IIA DDG, enabling the crew to excel as the AMDC while USS Lake Erie (CG 70) underwent maintenance.

These achievements underscore the value AWOs bring as force multipliers to both the AMDC and the CSG as a whole. Air Defense Commanders are increasingly requesting AWOs to integrate earlier in the CSG workup cycle to maximize combat readiness.

Overall, SMWDC Air Warfare Officers provide critical expertise, skills, and experience, directly enhancing the Navy's ability to conduct effective air operations and support mission success.

About the Authors

CDR Kowalcyk and CDR Rogers are both senior post-squadron E-2 Hawkeye department head Air Battle Managers and Air Warfare Officers at Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center Fleet Training Atlantic.

The Favor

By CDR David "Dangerous Dave" Diamond, USNR (Ret.)

Seasprite on deck

It was early December 2024 when I found a Facebook message request from the wife of my last LAMPS Commanding Officer, RADM Gary R. Jones. I responded and was provided the email of my CO. He said he wanted to ask a favor. Yes, the Seasprite Mafia was calling and asking for a favor. You know you have to say yes, but you just wonder what it will require.

I said, sure, what do you need? He explained that his former Commanding Officer, CAPT Earle Rogers II, a man he held in very high esteem, was ready for someone to take over duties as "the keeper" of the Seasprite Bubba List. I had once developed a Seasprite website and done a similar effort and am in the process of slowly building a new site for release in 2025. I said, yes. I can do that.

A few days later, I received the list and was informed the staff at NHA had already set up a mail server and had entered the original list. It took a little training, but the mail server was pretty easy to update. The advantage was it lets NHA keep a finger on the pulse of the community to help with future reunions and also to know when there are Signal Charlie notices to post to the larger NHA Community. It also ensures when I enter the Witness Protection Program to hide from the Seasprite Mafia, someone else can be asked a favor.

I don't have OCD, but if I did, I would call it CDO to make sure the initial list was in the correct alphabetical order. However, I decided I wanted to fill in some of the blanks. A few days later, I decided I wanted to have a community roster that allowed members to see who lives close to them and to allow mini regional meet and greet events in addition to a mail server list. I knew this would be additional work, but decided that would be my Christmas present to the Seasprite Community.

I developed a spreadsheet and figured out what I wanted to have on the roster. I wanted something useful, but not too detailed. I also knew I wanted to include spouses' names. That was based on my experience at the last Seasprite Reunion. I walked up to a guy who was a former IP, and, being happy I remembered his wife's name, asked how his (unknown to me) ex-wife was doing in front of his (unknown to me) new wife. I figured I would give people a chance to cram before their next reunion.

To honor the privacy of the original members, I sent an email to everyone letting them know I was developing a roster and asking them if they'd like to be included on the roster. I had a very low response rate. A week later, remembering my training, I sent an "Unless Otherwise Directed," you will be on the roster email. Now, that got some quick responses with the majority wanting to be on the roster. It also revealed a couple of email addresses that needed to be updated. This led me to learn how to use the email address update function on the mail server.

I began reaching out to Seasprite groups on Facebook and contacting people on LinkedIn, and the list began growing. During that time, I built a text quick file I could cut and paste into emails asking for the roster data. Some of the Seasprite squadron groups were pretty suspicious, and I had to get people from those squadrons who knew me to vouch for me.

Word started to spread and I was offered a reunion roster from HSL-94. Then, CAPT Ernie Rogers offered access to the old reunion email list. I thought about it and decided the best way to enter the reunion list and simultaneously build the roster was to provide an email with the data request format that he could forward to all the reunion lists (yes, there was more than one list).

CAPT Ernie Rogers forwarded my email the day after the Army/Navy game. Now a new game was on. I knew the fire hydrant was about to open and I was about to get flooded with emails. Requests were coming in faster than I could process them, but around midnight things finally calmed down. I figured on Monday I would have another deluge as people checked their email that morning. The flood wasn't as bad, but I was very busy.

I wanted to test the server earlier rather than later, so I posted my first roster on December 15th. It didn't work as expected, and I had now added the "I don't see an attachment" emails to my already exploding inbox. I worked with the staff at NHA and they got it working. I didn't want to flood everyone's email testing it, but had announced I would send a new roster when we went over 200 members. On December 16th, I sent the new version of the roster and thankfully didn't get more "I don't see the attachment" responses.

To manage expectations, I said I would not provide another update until January 1st or when we reached 500 members. The goal was to eventually provide a quarterly copy and the most recent version would be provided to anyone who joins the mail list after an update. I thought that would buy me time, but then the HSL-94 reunion roster arrived two weeks earlier than expected. The HC-1 historian, Ronald D. Milam, sent me an email telling me he forwarded my email to all 500 people on his list.

What had I gotten myself into? That's when I realized my old CO saw I had that special kind of crazy required to jump on this grenade. It was actually fun getting requests from people spanning the beginning of Seasprite history all the way through the last U.S. Navy Seasprite squadron.

You would think I would have learned my lesson, but I didn't. I decided to see if this can include ALL Seasprite squadrons and units. There were squadrons in Australia, Egypt, New Zealand, Peru, and Poland. Seasprites were also used as Search and Rescue aircraft at Navy and Marine Corps air stations. There was even a Tomahawk variant that was tested by the U.S. Army.

So, that is why I'm here. If you know someone who flew, fixed, or supported Seasprite helicopters and wants to join the Seasprite mailing list, please reach out to me at: Seasprites-owner@helobubbas.com

Please provide as much of the following information you feel comfortable sharing with other members on the quarterly all hands roster:

-Final rank (and rate, if appropriate)
-Name
-Callsign
-Email address
-Phone number in (XXX) XXX-XXXX format
-Current city
-Current state
-Assigned Seasprite units (in numerical order)
-Spouse's name

If you were a member of a non-U.S. unit, let me know so I can note it on the roster.

Once on the all hands roster, you can change the information you share or remove yourself from the roster by contacting the list keeper. Changes to the roster will appear in the quarterly update.

If you want to receive reunion notices and the all hands roster, but remain off the roster, we can also accommodate that as well. Just provide your rank, name, and email address, and state you don't want to appear on the roster. Once enrolled in the server, you always have the option to leave without requesting permission from the list keeper.

If you ever get asked "that" favor by your community, you can learn from my experience. Don't do it. No, I'm kidding. It has been less painful than I thought it could be and it has been fun connecting with old friends and making new ones.

I want to thank CAPT Earle Rogers II, CAPT Ernie Rogers, CAPT Jim Gillcrist, CDR Mike Brattland, Ronald D. Milam, CDR Tom Dunn, and LCDR Bill Zorovich for helping me build the list so quickly.

At the end of the day, it's about keeping a community of people together with very similar, and, in some cases, wildly different experiences. How often do you get an email from the crew of a Medal of Honor flight or the guy who was strapped in a turning helicopter on the deck of a ship when it struck a mine?

If you don't hear from me for a while, you know what I'm doing. For RADM Gary R. Jones, I love you, but my favor is done. Who am I kidding? You know I'd do it again.

The Green Deck that Wasn't

CDR "Dangerous Dave" Diamond, USNR (Ret.)

While I was assigned to Destroyer Squadron Twenty (DESRON 20), we embarked on our flag ship, USS Hayler (DD 997), to conduct Multi-National Maritime Interdiction Operations (MMIO) off the coast of Haiti. We were working with U.S., Dutch and Canadian Navy ships and aircraft enforcing United Nations sanctions against the Haitian government. It was often boring duty and I was glad there was an Air Detachment (Det) on our flag ship that allowed me to talk to some other brown shoes.

The Air Det on USS Hayler was from Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light (HSL) 42. While their usual call sign was Proud Warrior, this detachment used the callsign Rogue Warrior. Sometimes when you're bored and typing up flight schedules you don't get to participate in, you do strange things for fun. I looked at the spelling of Rogue Warrior and realized rearranging a couple of letters would give it a whole new meaning. I told the Commodore my idea, and, since he had a good sense of humor, he told me to go ahead.

For the next week, I wrote the schedules using Rouge rather than Rogue Warrior. The Det didn't notice until one day the Commodore was on the bridge and asked the Detachment Officer in Charge (Det OIC), "So, how is Rouge today?" The OIC said, "That's Rogue Warriors, sir!" My Commodore chuckled and said, "That's not what's on the schedule." A few minutes later, I was visited by a very embarrassed and unhappy Det Operations Officer. It took a couple of days before he appreciated my warped sense of humor and we were back on speaking terms.

During that period, our assigned Canadian frigate, HMCS Annapolis (DDH 265), suffered a boiler explosion and had to leave station for repairs. The Canadian Navy wanted to cover that commitment and had a pre-commissioned frigate, HMCS Ville de Québec (FFH 332), performing sea trials in the Caribbean. A couple of days later, Ville de Québec's crew began performing actual operations with us.

As the DESRON Air Operations Officer, I learned that their flight deck wasn't certified for takeoffs and landings, but they were certified to perform hoisting to and from the flight deck and vertical replenishment. Shortly after this, I was told I would be sent to Ville de Québec as an exchange officer for an overnight visit.

I would be flown to the ship in a UH-3 Sea King assigned to Fleet Composite Squadron Eight (VC-8) and the next day the Hayler's Air Det would pick me up in their SH-60B Seahawk and return me to their ship.

Remembering the Rouge Warrior joke, I briefed the Air Det that they would be hoisting me and said I would appreciate it if they didn't tea bag me (dip me in the water while I was on the hoist cable) as revenge. They smiled at me in a way I knew they were considering it, so I packed accordingly.

On the day I was scheduled to visit Ville de Québec, the Sea King showed up with an external load and hoisted me from Hayler's flight deck. When we arrived at Ville de Québec, they dropped their external load, circled off the stern waiting for

FFH-332-HMCS-Ville-de-Quebec

it to be cleared, then hovered over the green flight deck with yellow markings, and lowered me to the deck with the hoist cable.

The first half of my mission was complete, and I was still dry. So far, so good. I was welcomed into the hangar, stripped out of my flight and survival gear, and then was brought up to the bridge to meet the captain. He was a pleasant man and obviously proud of his new command and happy to be doing actual operations. While I was on the bridge, he got a call and asked me why the Sea King had hovered over their deck to retrieve retrograde with a red deck status.

This caught me by surprise, because I was already onboard and transiting from the hangar to the bridge when it happened. Since I was the U.S. Navy representative on a foreign vessel, I gave the standard response, "Sir, I don't know, but I will find out." The captain was okay with that response and they gave me a tour of the rest of the ship. I must say it was a nice ship and I was impressed by their engineering spaces. The engineers sat in an air conditioned control room with computerized controls for all of their equipment. This was light years ahead of the engineering spaces I toured on USS Yosemite (AD 19) during my 3rd Class Midshipman Cruise.

The tour ended in the Wardroom. I was invited to a nice dinner and invited to the bar. I didn't know their restrictions on alcohol and asked for a bourbon. That's when I learned they allowed alcohol but only beer and wine while at sea. I adjusted my order to a red wine and spent some time getting to know the officers. After that, I went to their Combat Information Center and held my radio conference with the Air Det to set up the patrol plan for the next day. After all, the Helicopter Element Coordinator (HEC) never gets a day off.

I returned to the Wardroom, talked with a few more officers, and learned more about their ship. After that, I went to my assigned stateroom and put in a request for a wake up time that would allow me to be ready for my hoist off the ship the next morning.

One thing I found interesting with the Canadian Navy was that all bridge (1MC) announcements were made in two languages: French and English. I was told when a ship was ordered, a decision was made about which language was used first. Ville de Québec was primarily French, so all announcements were first made in French and then shortly followed in English.

The next morning, I woke up to "Wakey, Wakey!" and prepared for my return to Hayler. I was waiting in the hangar with the crash crew and the captain when the Seahawk crossed over the flight deck (with a Green Deck status). I was waiting for the hoist to be lowered when it happened. The Seahawk performed the first ever landing on Ville de Québec's uncertified flight deck.

At first I was surprised, then I was concerned the deck would not support the aircraft's weight, then I saw the captain's face. "Why did they land," he asked. For the second time in two days, I was in the awkward position of telling the Commanding Officer (CO) of a foreign vessel, "Sir, I don't know, but I will find out."

I rushed to the aircraft, strapped in, and got on the Intercommunications System (ICS). I told the pilots, "You do know this flight deck isn't certified for landings, right?" They said, "We checked the Helicopter Operations from Ships other Than Aircraft Carriers (HOSTAC) Manual a couple of weeks ago and all the decks were certified." I said, "The Canadian ship you checked a couple of weeks ago had a boiler explosion. This ship is their replacement and hasn't even been certified for landing with Canadian helicopters, let alone something as heavy as this."

We lifted and headed back towards the Hayler. The pilots asked if we could keep this to ourselves. I said I wish we could, but the Sea King violation of Red Deck status the day before probably wasn't going to let that happen. As if on cue, I heard the CO of Ville de Québec calling our aircraft to ask them why they landed on an uncertified flight deck. They provided the same excuse they provided me, and I wasn't sure that would satisfy him.

It was a quiet flight back to the Hayler. After landing, I debriefed my Commodore. He asked if I had told the Air Det about the ship swap. I told him I had joked with them about not teabagging me after hoisting me, so I thought they understood it was supposed to be a hoist recovery.

The Commodore contacted Ville de Québec's CO and was able to smooth things over. The Air Det OIC had a long discussion with the pilots that flew that event and they were directed to write an article for Approach Magazine as their punishment. I felt bad for them, and figured I could at least suggest a title, "The Green Deck That Wasn't." For years I kept my eye out for that article, but never saw it, so, I figured I would tell the story here.

About the Author

CDR David D. Diamond (NHA Lifetime Member #367) flew the SH-2F Seasprite (LAMPS MKI) with HSL-30 DET ALFA, Neptune's Horsemen, and HSL-34, the Greencheckers. He was a Selected Reservist assigned to CTW-5 NR DET 282, the Elks, and provided direct support to HT-18, the Vigilant Eagles, when he got to take this all expenses paid camping trip. He retired with over 3,600 mishap free flight hours. He also holds the unique distinction of wearing five different ranks and holding three different designators while assigned to HT-18.

Why We Need More FACTS

By LT Clara "Big Country" Koch, USN

In 1974, the first six women of Naval Aviation earned their "wings of gold," a landmark moment that transformed the Navy's Aviation Community. To put this in historical perspective, 114 years ago, in 1910, the Department of the Navy ordered the first Navy Lieutenant into flight training at the Glenn Curtiss Aviation Camp in San Diego, California. Over the initial six decades before 1974, Naval Aviation was built from the ground up with the needs of the Navy in mind. Needs that have since evolved as the demographic of an all-male aviation community has shifted to include female aviators post-1973, especially after women were permitted into combat units and missions starting in 1993.

As most pilots will tell you, sometimes you won't know the gear fits quite right until you're already in the aircraft and flying the mission. Today, fifty years after those first pioneering women aviators, the equipment, instructions, and policies presently affecting women in aviation are seeing the results of the extensive feedback and adaptations championed by generations of female aviators. The Female Aviator Career Training Symposium, known as "FACTS," was created to acknowledge and address these issues. The symposium and its leaders focused on the idea that it is not about the quantity of service the Navy provides its people, but about the quality of service we provide our high-end warfighters.

FACTS convened in San Diego in early September, with the theme "The Next 50 Years of Women in Naval Aviation." Several leaders across Naval Aviation and throughout various commands gathered, including our current Air Boss, VADM Daniel "Undra" Cheever, along with the Chief of Navy Reserve, VADM Nancy Lacore, and other leaders such as RADM Verissimo, RADM Brophy, RDML Mietus, and RDML Spencer. Their presence underscored the significance of the topics addressed. It also enabled the panel to represent the entire "street-to-fleet" progression of a Naval Aviator—from our time as Student Naval Aviators in Pensacola under CNATRA through our sea tours, shore tours, and all the way to the world of the Navy Reserves. FACTS serves as an excellent platform to field questions and foster professional curiosity, but it is also a tool to generate solutions to help the men and women who fight daily to create a higher-quality Navy.

Many questions were posed by the attendees.

The symposium covered critical topics, including women's healthcare, gender-specific flight gear, mental health and toughness, career progression, and family planning. Representatives from the Office of Women's Policy expanded on multiple programs, including the Navy's Maternity Pilot Program, FIT Clinics to aid in creating a broader range of sizes, updated body composition assessment (BCA) standards, and CNAF 3710.7 policy changes on pregnancy and flying. Captain Leslie Kindling, the Force Aeromedical Safety Officer, highlighted new flight gear developments such as female flight boots, maternity flight suits, a female urinary relief system, and gender-specific outer layer jackets. Commander Susan Malboeuf, a leading Navy psychologist, shared insights on the female mindset and the cognitive-emotional health required to deal with the stressors particular to Naval Aviation, leaving us with several tools to tackle common cognitive distortions. Loree Draud, a former F/A-18 Hornet pilot, spoke to us on her four tenets of personal success: self-awareness, openness,

FACTS attendees in San Diego, 2024

appreciation, and the ability to respond. Lastly, representatives from Balboa Naval Hospital discussed pregnancy and fertility care, contraceptive options, and several women's healthcare policies that offer aid to women seeking care.

FACTS addressed many issues that, in the past, were sidelined in favor of more pressing priorities or seen as too controversial or emotional. Participating in a forum where Naval Aviators could openly discuss and debate such topics with a focus on improvement was impressive. Both the presenters and attendees contributed to a professional and candid dialogue about the realities female aviators have faced over the last fifty years, with all participants having a stake in the outcome. While the Navy has made significant strides in supporting its female service members, FACTS ensures that more positive progress will always be made. The success of FACTS highlights the Navy's ongoing commitment to advancing the quality of service for all who serve. It is now time for the next fifty years of aviators to decide how we will defend these ideals and reinforce the progress made by the warfighters who came before us.

Air Boss answers the questions.

Dragon Whales in the MED!
HSC-28's Newest Detachment Established on NAS Sigonella

By LT Seth "SHAFT" Abbott, USN

Ghostriders and Specters 28.1 & 28.5 XLOG Training near NAS Signonella

The Helicopter Sea Combat (HSC) Community is an inherently versatile warfighting community. The MH-60S is an incredibly diverse platform with multiple mission sets which allows HSC to ALWAYS have the watch. Since its creation, HELSEACOMBATRON TWO EIGHT (HSC-28) has provided combat-ready aircraft capable of Search and Rescue (SAR), Vertical Replenishment (VERTREP), Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC), Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), Special Operations Forces (SOF) Support, personnel transfers, and logistical support to Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet. Headquartered in Sigonella, Italy, HSC-28's Detachment (Det) 1 "Ghostriders" have stood ready to support Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet and their flagship, USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20). The rousing success of Det 1's past and present led to this past year's desire to increase HSC-28's presence in Sixth Fleet in the form of a second, independently taskable detachment. As a result, the "Specters" of HSC-28 Det 5 were born.

"The Specters are excited to stand up the second detachment at NAS Sigonella, the "Hub of the Med." This opportunity not only allows for increased readiness, greater flexibility, and effectiveness with operational tasking within the Mediterranean but also offers increased training opportunities," said LCDR Jennifer "TOFT" Groger, HSC-28 Det 5 Specters' Officer-in-Charge (OIC). Under her leadership, Det 5, consisting of 27 officers and enlisted personnel, departed Norfolk in October 2024. As HSC-28 stands up the new detachment, the Plank Owners of Det 5 have found, at every turn, the benefits of having two detachments in Sigonella.

The most advantageous aspect of having two detachments in Italy is their operational flexibility. Teamwork is a foundational part of Naval Aviation, especially in the helicopter community. A lone helicopter is a powerful tool, but having two helicopters working in tandem is a prized asset for any operational commander. A section of helicopters working together provides an unmatched level of mutual support, efficiency, and flexibility thereby exponentially increasing their capability. Two Seahawks can mean more people moved or supplies delivered logistically or firepower brought to the fight when called upon. Both Dets 1 and 5 work and train together daily but are designed and manned in such a way as to make them completely independent when needed. By carefully managing schedules, maintenance, and qualifications between the detachments, HSC-28 is able to maintain a fully mission-capable aircraft to support any tasking that could arise in the Sixth Fleet AOR.

Take, for example, the events of early December. HSC-28 was tasked to transport a civilian mariner from USNS Medgar Evers (T-AKE 13), who received a Red Cross message. Det 1, actively trying to fly a set number of hours to get their aircraft into a phase maintenance period, coordinated with Det 5 to conduct the mission. Det 5 was able to quickly restructure their flight schedule and complete the tasking, while Det 1 was able to execute their events as needed. The mutual support, careful planning, and teamwork between the two detachments resulted in reliable mission accomplishment. Furthermore, it allowed both aircraft to hit their respective phase windows with an appropriate gap, allowing for continuous HSC coverage within the Mediterranean.

The addition of a second helicopter quickly yielded additional benefits for the squadron. "The most noticeable difference up front is our ability to train," said LT Brandon Cummings, Det 1 Assistant OIC (AOIC). "With Det 5 out here, we can actually make progress in the ACTC Syllabus." Both Det 5 and Det 1 deployed with ACTC Level II and Level III candidates. Having a second aircraft in Sigonella means, for the first time ever, a shore-based HSC-28 detachment can make significant progress towards ACTC qualifications while forward deployed. This is a massive boon for the largest expeditionary squadron on the East Coast, whose Home Guard training department is consistently under the burden of qualifying Aircraft Commanders to meet the constantly expanding mission of the Dragon Whales worldwide. In the months since Det 5 and Det 1 have been deployed together, they have completed four pilot Level III events, five pilot Level II events, two aircrew Level II events, and two aircrew Level III boards. The ability to train and develop their forward-deployed aircrews keeps them sharp, active, and able to take advantage of their unique environment.

Naval Aircrewman (Helicopter) 1st Class Ben Chellew, left, and Naval Aircrewman (Helicopter) 2nd Class Meriah Romo, assigned to the "Ghost Riders" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 28, conduct a Search and Rescue exercise onboard an MH-60S Sea Hawk, Dec. 12 . **U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Austin Ingram.**

In addition to ACTC progression, Dets 1 and 5 have a singular advantage over other HSC-28 detachments: Mountain Flying. The island of Sicily is a beautiful, mountainous environment with numerous peaks and mountain ranges reaching 2,000-3,000m in elevation, a stark contrast to Norfolk, Virginia, where HSC-28 is located. A common complaint of East Coast pilots is their lack of exposure to the mountainous environment compared to their West Coast counterparts. Air Wing Fallon and NAWDC's Mountain Flying Course are historically the only times East Coast pilots get to experience flight in the mountainous environment. To take advantage of Sicily's numerous mountain ranges, HSC-28 sent one junior officer Aircraft Commander and one Utility Aircrewman from each detachment to NAWDC's Mountain Flying Course before deploying. By completing this course, each detachment can now instruct mountain flying procedures and increase exposure and experience amongst the flyers.

Of course, standing up a new detachment is not without its issues. Years of constantly rotating squadrons through the spaces, followed by a period of disuse, made for a challenging start, but the Specters of Det 5 started strong! Investing in cleaning supplies, paint, and small pieces of furniture, the detachment spaces began to take shape. "The pilots started in OPS," said LT Tom "Sweet Tom" Santee. "We wanted to show the Det that it was okay to take some pride in their spaces and to make them their own." After a solid week of effort, the spaces of Det 5 were transformed. A fresh coat of paint covered years of neglect, but the Detachment refused to paint over the murals left behind by previous VP detachments. "We respect that we're in a long line of aviators who have kept watch over the Mediterranean. They left their mark just as we hope to leave ours," said LT Ian "Doug" Grider. They left their mark indeed. Within days, the Specter spaces were noticeably set apart with a stenciled red V, the Roman numeral 5 that appears prominently on their logo.

With a little less than half of the deployment remaining, the Specters look forward to all they still hope to achieve. With new Aircraft Commander and Aircrew training flights always in development, as well as an integrated flight with the base Military Working Dogs and their handlers in the works, the Det continues to push further. The most exciting thing on the horizon? In March, for the first time, the Specters of Det 5 will embark on USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20). "It's a little thing, but it's cool to be the first ones not only to stand up the detachment but also the first Specters to get underway," said LT Grider. The dedication, excitement, and pride that so many members of HSC-28 have shown to get this detachment stood up is the most recent example of why the Dragon Whale culture of excellence has been a longstanding pillar of the Naval Aviation Community.

The HSC-28 DET 5 Specters have received outstanding support from NASSIG and the Italian Air Operations Team. They look forward to continued future operations supporting Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet and USS Mount Whitney.

Easyriders' Golden Anniversary: Celebrating 50 Years of Maritime Excellence

On July 3, 2025, Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron Thirty Seven (HSM-37), the "Easyriders," will reach a historic milestone, 50 years of continuous service in Naval Aviation. Established at Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Hawaii, in 1975, HSM-37 has been at the forefront of maritime helicopter operations, adapting through decades of evolving missions, technology advancements, and operational demands.

Initially commissioned as Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light (HSL-37), the Easyriders began operations flying the SH-2F Seasprite, delivering critical anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities at the height of the Cold War. Operating aboard frigates, cruisers, and destroyers, the squadron was instrumental in safeguarding the Pacific region against submarine threats.

In 1992, the squadron transitioned to the SH-60B Seahawk under the LAMPS Mk III Program. This move expanded the Easyriders' operational scope, integrating advanced systems for enhanced surveillance, ASW, and surface warfare capabilities. In 2013, shortly after logging its 100,000th flight hour in the SH-60B, the squadron was redesignated Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron Thirty Seven (HSM-37) as it transitioned to the MH-60R Seahawk. This advanced platform introduced sophisticated sensors, radar Systems, dipping sonar, and electronic warfare technology, greatly augmenting the squadron's capabilities within carrier and expeditionary strike groups across the Pacific.

Throughout its distinguished 50-year history, the Easyriders have contributed significantly to critical operations, including Operations DESERT STORM, ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM, and INHERENT RESOLVE. The squadron has also actively supported humanitarian relief efforts, notably following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami,Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, and support to the Maui wildfires in 2023.

HSM-37 continues its tradition of excellence through expeditionary operations supporting maritime security, strategic deterrence, and active participation in multinational exercises, strengthening interoperability with allied and partner forces. The squadron maintains a continuous forward-deployed presence throughout the Indo-Pacific, regularly supporting freedom of navigation operations, maritime security patrols, and regional stability missions. The Easyriders have maintained a close supporting relationship with U.S. Coast Guard District 14 throughout its history, providing critical Search and Rescue and medical evacuation support to the Hawaiian Islands that continues to this day.

As HSM-37 celebrates its 50th anniversary, the Easyriders proudly honor the legacy of Sailors past and present, recognizing their dedicated service and invaluable contributions to Naval Aviation.

The Easyriders warmly invite all former squadron members, families, friends, and supporters to commemorate this historic milestone at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Hangar 101 on July 2nd and 3rd, 2025. Anniversary events will feature a kickoff ceremony with a very special guest speaker, squadron tours highlighting the MH-60R Seahawk with historical displays, and a beach luau to reconnect, reflect, and honor our shared heritage.

For detailed event information, dates, and RSVP instructions, please visit:
https://einvitations.afit.edu/inv/anim.cfm?i=961366&k=0B67430A7D51

CDR Michael S. Moorse
Commanding Officer, Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron Three Seven

cordially invites all former HSL-37 and HSM-37 Easyriders
to a commemoration of the

50th Anniversary of the Easyriders
Hangar 101, MCAS Kaneohe Bay, HI

Schedule of Events

Wednesday, 2 July 2025

1000–1100 | 50th Anniversary Kickoff

Join us as we officially commemorate the 50-year legacy of HSL-37 and HSM-37 with a ceremony at the Easyriders' new home in Hangar 101. This event will feature distinguished guest speakers, the Marine Corps Band, cake cutting, and a tribute to Easyriders who have shaped the squadron's history.

1100–1500 | Squadron Open House and Simulator Tours

Following the ceremony, attendees will have the opportunity to tour squadron facilities, aircraft displays, and try their hand at the MH-60R flight simulator (reservation required). Engage with current squadron members, explore advancements in naval aviation, and take part in interactive experiences that highlight HSM-37's operational capabilities. All are encouraged to bring old photos, patches, or other memorabilia to pin onto display boards in the hangar to spark the sharing of sea stories and memories with the Easyriders.

Thursday, 3 July 2025

0800 | Golf Outing or Simulator Tours

Tee off with fellow Easyriders at the breathtaking Klipper Golf Course, renowned for its spectacular oceanfront views and challenging course design. This friendly competition is a great way to reconnect, enjoy the outdoors, and celebrate the Easyrider spirit. Optionally, another opportunity to tour the MH-60R flight simulator on base.

1200 | Easyrider Luau

Unwind at the Easyrider Luau, set against the stunning turquoise ocean backdrop and the Ko'olau mountain range at Bellows Beach. This family-friendly event provides the perfect setting for alumni and current squadron members to relax, share sea stories, and enjoy the camaraderie that defines the Easyrider legacy. Food will be available for purchase and kayaks, paddleboards, and other equipment will be available to rent.

RSVP

Please confirm your attendance to any scheduled events by **June 10, 2025** at **https://e.afit.edu/57PBdZ**

Change of Command

COMHSMWINGLANT

CAPT David Bizzari, USN
relieved
CAPT John Anderson, USN
January 23, 2025

TRAWING 5

CAPT Kenneth Kerr, USN
relieved
Col. Anthony Krockel, USMC
February 13, 2025

COMHSCWINGPAC

CAPT Chad Upright, USN
relieved
CAPT William Eastham, USN
February 6, 2025

HSC-23 WILDCARDS

CDR Kevin Ringelstein, USN
relieved
CDR Marcus Hoogewind, USN
February 13, 2025

HSM-79 Griffins

CDR Alex Haupt, USN
relieved
CDR Chris Yost, USN
February 25, 2025

HSM-77 Saberhawks

CDR Charles Kreuz, USN
relieved
CDR Sean Cavanagh, USN
February 28, 2025

HSC-11 DRAGONSLAYERS

CDR Brett Ballard, USN
relieved
CDR Wesley Johnson, USN
February 15, 2025

Naval Air Station Pensacola

CAPT Chandra Newman, USN
relieved
CAPT Terrence Shashaty, USN
November 15, 2024

Maritime Support Wing

CAPT Peter Lauder, USN
relieved
CAPT Nathan Rodenbarger USN
April 4, 2025

VRM-30 Titans

CDR Charles Yeargin, USN
relieved
CDR Sean Cavanagh, USN
March 6, 2025

HSMWSL Talons

CDR Ryan Brack, USN
relieved
CDR Nathan Browne, USN
December 12, 2024

HX-21 Blackjack

Lt. Col. Aaron E. Okun, USMC
relieved
CDR Nicholas Green, USN
February 13, 2025

HSCWSP The Phoenix

CDR Michael Brown, USN
relieved
CDR Dermot Killian, USN
April 3, 2025

HSM-78 Blue Hawks

CDR Richard Murray, USN
relieved
CDR Brian Conner, USN
April 21, 2025

From the Archives: *Chopper Pilots Is the Craziest Peoples* By LCDR Earl Bergsma, USN (Ret.)

By LCDR Drew Hamblin, USN (Ret.)

If you're anything like me, you've never loved self-deprecating descriptions and depictions of Helicopter pilots, yet that's exactly what we find in Earl Bergsma's self-published memoir: *Chopper Pilots is the Craziest Peoples*, that I happened to find in the NHA Historical Society's archives recently. I've often found the authors of these early accounts practically apologizing for the "strangeness" of their aircraft and the way they operated them. Little did they know that they were the pioneers of what can today best be compared to flying a real-life stylish and lethal magic carpet that would be the envy of anyone!

What I find most compelling in these accounts is the amount of pluck they mustered to define their own tactics, techniques and procedures with little oversight and almost no standing guidance. In many cases, they served as Detachment OICs with a small team of maintainers and aircrewmen as the sole pilot and officer, on ships where the wardroom had very little understanding of their capabilities or needs.

While some of the accounts require reader discretion and lack the propriety and sensitivity we expect today, I hope you find these curated selections from this circa 1992 book as inspiring, informative, and interesting as I did.

In The Beginning

In the summer of 1946, I saw my first helicopter. I was stationed at the time on a small atoll island named Ebeye Navy Number 807, six miles from Kwajalein, Marshall Islands, United States Protectorate. Kwajalein's harbor was loaded with ships - most of them were unmanned. These were to be towed to Bikini Atoll to serve as targets for the forthcoming Atomic Bomb Tests. One of the command ships was loaded with U.S. Army brass and it had an experimental Bell helicopter operating off a makeshift platform on its stern. At this time, the U.S. Air Force did not exist as a separate service so the U.S. Army Air Corps was still a branch of the U.S. Army.

Ebeye had been a Japanese seaplane base. When we captured it, all Japanese equipment and buildings were bulldozed to one end of the island; and we started from scratch with our own Quonset huts, Dallas huts, and tents. The seaplane launching ramps and parking pads were repaired, and Ebeye became the headquarters of Admiral Harrel, the new commander of the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. As World War II progressed closer to the Japanese mainland, the facilities of the Marshall Islands became deserted. In 1946, these facilities were patched up and revitalized to support the Atomic Bomb Tests. Kwajalein had a good air strip and it became an aircraft refueling strip between Hawaii, Midway or Wake and Guam or Saipan. It also became the headquarters for a one-star Commodore.

Bikini had no airfield, so all priority personnel or cargo were flown there via PBM Mariner seaplanes from Ebeye. There

Ebeye Island marked in the Kwajalein Atoll, courtesy of Google Maps.

were three detachments from different seaplane squadrons, an aircraft service unit (CASU), and the Base personnel on this sand and coral reef. The island was two blocks wide, two thirds of a mile long, had three trees, no grass, and was temporarily crowded. This all happened during a period when most everyone was getting mustered out of the service, so any individuals remaining behind were assigned to unusual jobs.

There is an old cliche in the Navy that states. "Rank amongst Ensigns is like virtue amongst whores·" Obviously there isn't any. The Base Commanding Officer was a Commander; the Executive Officer was a Lieutenant Commander; there were no Lieutenants or Lieutenants junior grade; I was the senior Ensign, so I became Operations Officer. After six months of island duty, I became a regular Naval Officer and was promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade. Our Executive Officer was conscripted to Kwajalein on the Commodore's staff, so I was promoted into the Executive Officer's position. It was a weird setup.

The Army helicopter from the command ship flew over to our island one day and the pilot asked if we had any 80 octane aviation gasoline. His Bell chopper would only operate on 80 octane; regular aircraft gasoline was 92 or 110 octane and was too potent for his chopper. His anticipated supply of gasoline had become lost somewhere enroute from the United States and he was desperate for fuel. We had all kinds of undocumented supplies including an engine for a Piper Cub airplane and a four foot square crate of condoms, so it wasn't too much of a surprise when we were able to locate thirty drums of 80 octane gasoline. He was elated over finding the fuel and shortly thereafter the Army dispatched a landing craft to our island in order to retrieve the fuel. The Army pilot, eager to show his appreciation, flew back to our base several times

and gave rides to our Commanding Officer, our Executive Officer, and myself. Of course, we logged the flights as copilot time since actual flight time was hard for us to acquire there on our lonely Pacific island. We had a TBM torpedo bomber, an SNJ Texan trainer aircraft, and a wheeled J2F single engine antique seaplane at Kwajalein for us carrier pilots to maintain our flight proficiency; however getting away from our work and getting over to Kwajalein was not easily done.

While the chart below does not show the vessels to scale or the direction in which they will each be pointing, it does indicate the relative position of the target ships in the first Bikini atom bomb test scheduled for 1 July. The battleship Nevada is the target ship, painted in red lead; more than a score of other ships are concentrated within a circle of 1,000 yards' radius of the Nevada. From the target ship to the shoreline of Bikini, upper right corner, is approximately 6,000 yards. Ships and smaller craft are to be so arrayed as to produce varying degrees of damage, and on the decks of the vessels and within them will be all manner of naval and military equipment and measuring devices to test the effect of the atomic bomb and to record the phenomena resulting from nuclear energy so released.

On Able Day minus one a practice drop put a sack of flour right on the Bull's Eye, the red painted USS Nevada BB 36. The Able Day actual bomb drop missed the Nevada, but hit USS Saratoga CV 3.

JOINT TASK FORCE ONE
ATOMIC BOMB TEST

SCIENCE

ENS. E.R. BERGSMA 431672 USN

has participated in [redacted] CROSSROADS ordered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to test the effect of the Atomic Bomb [redacted] and conducted at Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands

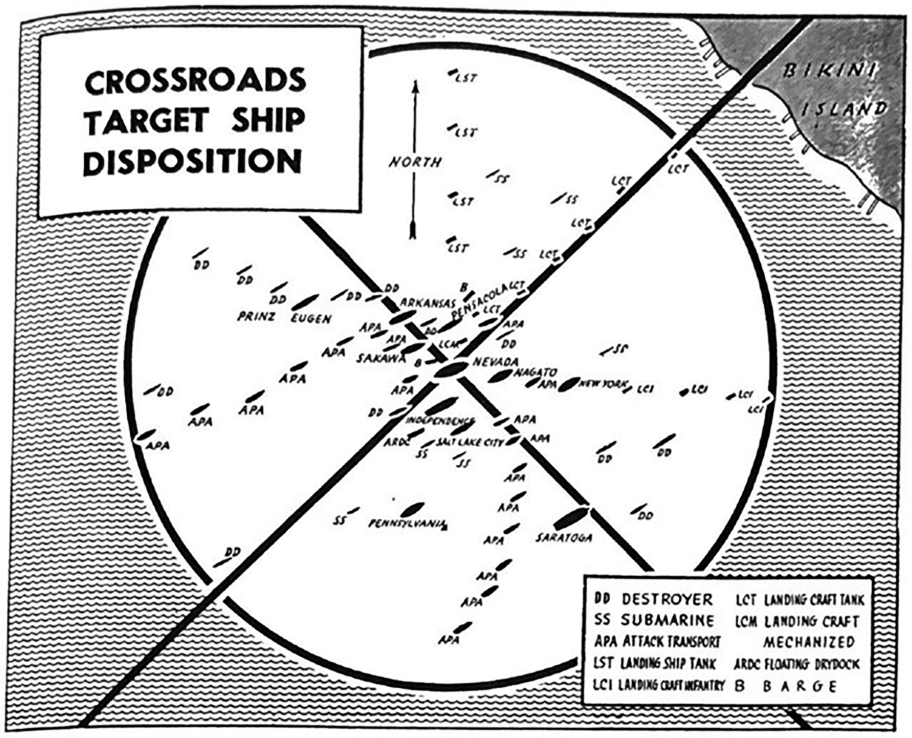
U.S. NAVAL AIR BASE, NAVY NO. 807
(Unit or ship)

H.D. LOVEWELL CDR. USNR.
Commanding

Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy
Commander Joint Task Force ONE

When the Atomic Bomb Tests were over, Ebeye almost became deserted again. I was transferred to the Naval Air Station in Alameda, California, in the fall of 1947 and the island was relegated to a caretaker status, with one Ensign and a small enlisted crew to handle the infrequent transient seaplanes. A recent National Geographic magazine had photographs of hundreds of Marshallese natives, who now call Ebeye their home.

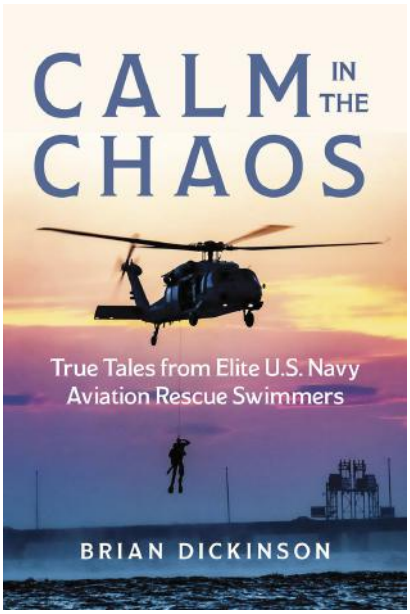
If you like these accounts and want more info on the NHA Historical Society or have a story to tell, please contact us through our website: https://www.nhahistoricalsociety.org/.



Atomic Bomb Test site layout diagram and ENS Bergsma participation card

Calm in the Chaos by Brian Dickinson

Reviewed by LCDR Chip Lancaster, USN (Ret.)



"I am a rescue swimmer! I'm here to help!" Perhaps you've found yourself in the driver's seat on a SAR or MEDEVAC and never really thought too much about the crewman in the back. It was all linked to the mission with everybody doing their job as they were trained to, so that the mission was completed effectively. The crewman in the back was more than just a U.S. Navy Aircrewman, more specifically, a U.S. Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmer. I know that personally in my career I never parsed everyone's job but just knew that they knew what they were doing and that everything would come together to get the job done.

Brian Dickinson has given us a look into the Naval Aviation Rescue Swimmer. His book is not a novel in the usual sense and much more than a mere look, he gives the reader a rescue swimmer masterclass. Through ten chapters, each aptly named for a unique aspect of his experience from the Mindset and Face Your Fears to Situational Awareness, Attention to Detail and Faith to Humility and Focus, he takes the reader on an honest blow-by-blow accounting. More than a simple accounting of a job, it is a lifestyle wrapped around the motto "so others may live." A career dedication where remaining "calm in the chaos" is critical to survival.

After a brief history of at-sea rescue, Brian lays out the specific course requirements. But that's just the appetizer, each of the requirements is amplified by actual SAR events from the 80's through the 2000's. The accounts are often harrowing, such as "A 400-foot cargo vessel about to crush them both … both being sucked under the massive keel as he swam with all his strength … how insanely arduous it was to continually fight against being sucked under and crushed … carrying a survivor was next to impossible!" The Aviation Rescue Swimmer School's Training Program pushes candidates every day from sunrise to sunset from day one through Hell Day to graduation. The training is designed to physically and mentally push them well beyond their limits, where they learn to "embrace the suck."

The SAR events covered are over sea and land from all classes of ships, carriers to smallboys to supply ships to submarines; and rotary-wing aircraft from H-1, H-2, H-3, H-46, and H-53 to H-60s. Events from man-overboard to ejections to pirate victims to tsunami disaster relief; from WESTPAC, the IO, and Middle East to Antarctica. The rescue swimmer is trained in much more than just extracting someone from a watery death. They must master martial arts to subdue overly aggressive victims. They are psychiatrists to calm panicked, agitated, and anxious survivors. They are emergency medical technicians able to treat wounds, breaks, dehydration, and exhaustion. They are skilled in jumping, or rappelling from the aircraft, or riding the hoist. They do all of this while overcoming their own exhaustion, fears, and anxiety to the point of being able to work continuously in adverse environments and under extreme conditions.

A unique aspect of Brian's book is his juxtaposition of events and analysis. Each chapter contains one or more illustrative missions, events or ordeals followed by his chapter-objective analysis, followed by subjective psychological and sociological analysis from his wife JoAnna, an accredited Christian counselor. "When life doesn't go as planned … how do we adapt to those unexpected trials? We can push in and persevere or pull away and withdraw. Success is often the result of … our ability to keep pushing through …." To keep pushing while remaining "calm in the chaos."

Brian Dickinson's writing is clear, concise, and easy to read. He tells his story exactly as he experienced it, holding nothing back. Naval aircrew, pilots, maintainers, and line-types of all ranks and ratings will identify with his accounts. The book also contains twenty pages of pictures, an extensive SAR-related bibliography, and a specific acknowledgements section. You may also want to check out his other book, *Blind Descent*, a harrowing account of his expedition to Mount Everest. Also check out the "AWS1 James Buriak Foundation (https://theaws1jamesburiakfoundation.org)" started by decorated Rescue Swimmer Jimmy Buriak's wife, Megan, to provide mishap education and support to the Navy and Marine Corps Community and families. Brian is also a motivational speaker, sharing his experiences with companies, organizations, and schools. I strongly recommend Calm in the Chaos, giving it five stars and two thumbs up. You can order it through any online publishing house. It is also in the NHA Library.

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Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
March 14, 2025

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
February 28, 2025

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
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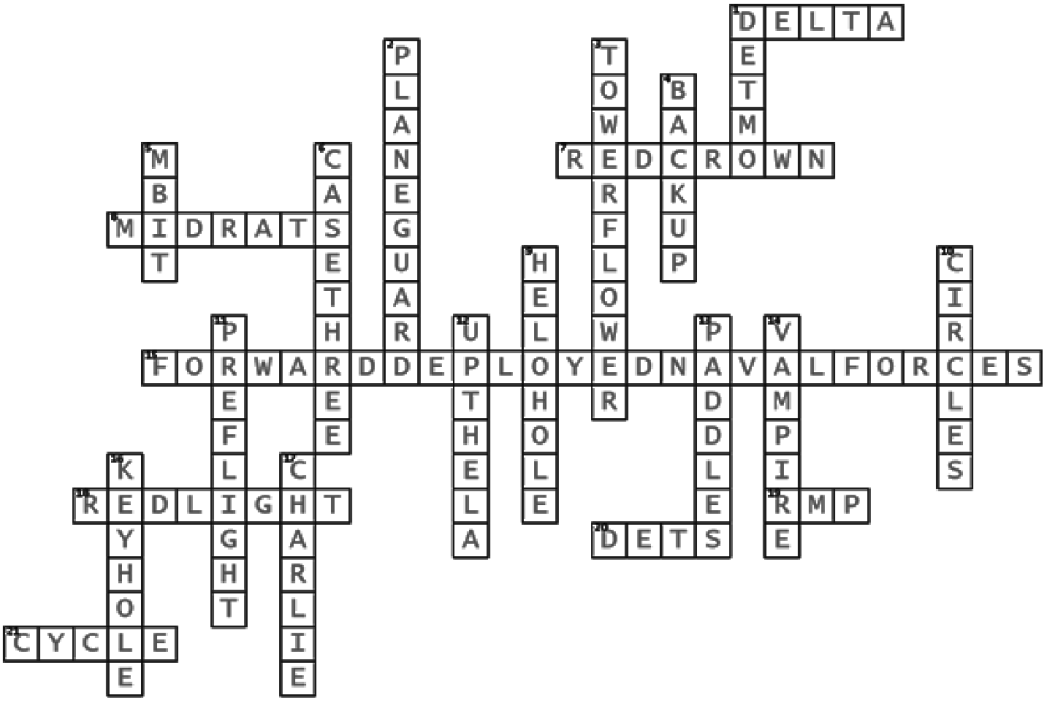
Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
January 31, 2025

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
January 17, 2025

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
December 13, 2024

Congratulations to the New HSC-3 Aircrew Graduates
March 14, 2025

First Off Deck Crossword Answers



Signal Charlie

CAPT Dick Catone, USN (Ret.), following a memorial service for a fellow helicopter pilot, is credited with the following statement, "I guess we are all in the starboard delta waiting for Signal Charlie." Starboard Delta is the holding pattern for the airborne Search and Rescue helicopters on the starboard (right) side of the aircraft carrier. They fly at a low altitude so as not to interfere with the fixed-wing aircraft recovery pattern, and only land when the last fixed-wing aircraft is safe on board. When tower calls the helicopter to pass "Charlie" to a landing spot, the crew knows the fixed-wing recovery is complete, all is well, and it is time to come back. Hence, the statement appears appropriate that someday we will receive our own "Signal Charlie" and will be called home for a final landing.

Signal Charlie has been created to inform our membership and honor the passing of fellow unrestricted aviators. It is only as good as the information we receive. If you have an obituary or other information that you would like to provide concerning the passing of a shipmate, co-worker, or friend of the community, please contact the NHA National Office at membership@navalhelicopterassn.org and we will get the word out.

CAPT Charles L. "Chuck" Fries, USN (Ret.)
June 5, 1934 - April 4, 2025

It's my sad duty to inform you that another member of the "HS-11 Wardroom" has left us. CAPT Chuck Fries passed away peacefully, Thursday evening–April 3rd, at his home in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL–he was 90. Captain "Chuck" Fries died peacefully, at his home in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida on 3 April 2025. He was born in Portland, Oregon, on 5 June 1934, to Leslie and Ada Laverne Fries.

Chuck graduated UCLA (ROTC) 6 June 1956. He entered Naval active duty on 9 June 1956. He received his master's degree from George Washington University on 14 May 1972. LTJG Fries became a Naval Aviator on December 17, 1957 at HTG-1, NAS Ellyson Field, Pensacola, FL. LTJG Fries was Navy Helicopter Pilot Designator Number #R-3867.

He was awarded the Legion of Merit (2 awards), Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Armed Forced Expeditionary Medal (2 awards), Meritorious Unit Commendation, Vietnam Service Medal, and Sea Service Deployment Ribbon.

Chuck was married to Kathryn Fries, for 47 years, until she passed away on 22 June 2019. Chuck had a distinguished 30-year career in the Navy as a fixed wing pilot, later transferring to rotary wing. His career encompassed Squadron Commander HS-1 and HS-11, Admin Officer, Commanding Officer afloat, USS Austin (LPD 4) and Commanding Officer shore duty. He is survived by five children: Charles David Fries of Myrtle Beach, SC; Susan Vigar of Seneca, SC; Deborah Koteles (stepdaughter) of Ponte Vedra Beach, FL; John Curr (stepson) of Palm Beach, FL; and Valerie Lopez (stepdaughter) of Frederick, MD.

Chuck was honored, 25 April 2025 with a graveside service at Ponte Vedra Valley Cemetery, followed by a Celebration of Life Ceremony reception and lunch at Café Andiamo. Those wishing to send a card or letter should mail it to the family of Chuck's stepdaughter: Ken & Debbie Kotelus, 5102 Otter Creek Drive, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082.

Fair Winds and Following Seas CAPT Fries!

CAPT Gerald Hill Dawson, USN (Ret.)
August 15, 1942 – January 27, 2025

LTJG Dawson became a Naval Aviator on October 3, 1968 at HT-8, NAS Ellyson Field, Pensacola, FL. LTJG Dawson was Navy Helicopter Pilot Designation Number #R-10130. CAPT Dawson was the former CO of HSL-37.

Gerald Hill Dawson, of White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia passed peacefully after an extended illness at the age of 82. Jerry was born at Charlottesville Virginia, August 15th, 1942 the only child of Reginald and Katherine Dawson. He was raised in West Virginia, moving from town to town as his father worked on the road. By the time he entered college, he had lived in sixteen towns. Jerry graduated from Augusta Military Academy in 1962, later he graduated from West Virginia Tech in 1966 with a Bachelor of Science Degree. Furthering his education, he earned a Masters at The Naval War College, in Newport, Rhode Island. He dodged the draft in 1966 by joining the Navy and was commisioned as an Ensign. He was designated a Naval Aviator in 1968 and served 26-years in the Navy, with three combat tours. He served as Commanding Officer of a Helicopter Squadron. Additionally, he served as Air Boss on a Helicopter Aircraft Carrier, spending 13 out of 26 years on sea duty. He successfully made 24 open sea rescues, and retired in 1992 as a Navy Captain. Upon his retirement from the Navy, he became the oldest rookie to earn commencement honors from The San Diego Regional Police Academy in 1993, and became a Police Officer for Chula Vista, California.

Upon returning to West Virginia, he found the love of his life Sandra Compton-Lockhart, after an extended courtship. They were married in 2004. He served as City Manager of White Sulphur Springs for a number of years, before earning his teaching degree. He spent seven proud years as a Special Education Teacher at Clifton Middle School, Clifton Forge, Virginia, where he lead the Yearbook Staff for many academic years. He retired from teaching in 2006. He enjoyed his life in West Virginia which included people, as well as memories from his younger days. His favorite pastime was riding his 1946 Willys Jeep over Kate's Mountain, and entertaining friends on Kate's at The Shelter on top for candlelit dinners. Later, Sandy and Jerry moved to Lewisburg and they enjoyed entertaining friends for dinner on their deck each summer. His personal enjoyment came from seeing your eyes when he placed a T-Bone on your plate that hung well over both sides.

Survivors include his four sons, Michael McNeff and his wife Melanie of Andover, Minnesota, Scott Dawson and his wife Gemma of Crestwood, Kentucky, Sean Dawson of Chula Vista, California, and Karl Dawson and his wife Erica of Oakland, California; grandchildren; Tori Dugan and her family in Kentucky, Ashley Stipe and her family of Texas, Breeshae Dawson of California, Amara Sanders of California, J.J. Dawson of California, and Jake, Julia, and Ashlyn McNeff of Minnesota; as well as, 6 great-grandchildren.His loving wife survives him, Sandra Lockhart-Dawson, who has been a selfless caretaker the last few years as his health declined and he battled dementia, as well as her family.

In addition to his parents, preceding him in death is a step-son, Brian Lockhart. Survivors include a step-son Robert Lockhart of Atlanta, Georgia and grandsons, Ryan Lockhart of White Sulphur Springs, W.V. and Aaron Lockhart of Lewisburg, W.V., as well as one great-granddaughter.

A Celebration of Life for Jerry was held on Saturday, February 22, 2025 at the Wallace & Wallace Chapel in White Sulphur Springs with Pastor Greg Scott officiating.

Fair Winds and Following Seas CAPT Dawson!

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