Winter 2025
Number 167

Rotor Review

Build Your Foundation

In This Issue:

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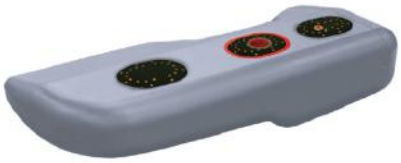

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A Dream Comes to Fruition

In 2021, CAPT Bill Personius, USN (Ret.) was asked by RADM Mac McLaughlin, USN (Ret.), the USS Midway Museum President and CEO, if he would be willing to take on getting a helicopter mounted at the front gate of North Island. RADM Mac felt that the Master Helicopter Base should have a helicopter at the Stockdale Gate. What better choice could there be than the SH-60F Medal of Honor Commemorative Helicopter flown during the Centennial of Naval Aviation Flyover in 2011?

The actual lift and mounting of the helicopter began in three places on Saturday morning at 0730, January 11, 2025. These places included the Double Domes Hangar Stockdale Gate at North Island, and with the Amphibious Construction Battalion ONE (ACB-1) from the Amphibious Base of NAB Coronado. A move team from HSCWINGPAC began the final move of the aircraft from the Double Domes Hangars at North Island, with a NORIS security escort as the aircraft was moved to the front gate, positioning the aircraft abeam the stanchion. The ACB-1 Team (Seabees) began their movement at 0730 of equipment and a 65-ton crane moved from the Amphibious Base, through Coronado to the Stockdale Gate where the crane was setup in lanes 4 and 5 of the Stockdale Gate as well as the commercial truck entry lanes abeam the stanchion.

The crane team was led by ENS Tieu, EOC Ellorin, EO1 Zimmergarger, and EO2 Villalon with support from EO2 Cole, EO2 Zhao, CM3 Fornaro, CM2 Albrecht, EO2 Gutierrez, and EO3 Blanchard. A final briefing was held on site with all parties involved in the lift including LCDR Matt Bettencourt, USN from HSC-3 who brought several high-end drones for use during the lift. Since the base would not allow flight, the drones were positioned on 20' tripods which could be moved and positioned around the stanchion. These drones and their close in video capabilities proved instrumental in the successful mounting of the helicopter and were used throughout the lift process because no one could be under the helicopter.

NATEC Leadership to include Bob Thompson, Jeff Coskey, and Whalon Hooker, AD2 Mendez (HSC-6), and Chief Kayla Douglas (HSC-3) were involved in the movement, hookup of the lifting sling, and leading the effort on the ground to guide location of the aircraft for the ACB-1 Crane Operator, EO2 Cole, which led to the attachment of the aircraft to the stanchion. Waylon Hooker handled the various wrenches and devices to bolt the aircraft to the stanchion with Chief Douglas running the manlift.

The manlift was graciously donated for this event and for the last two years for various activities to include restoration and aircraft maintenance at Flag Circle by Chuck Graff of Sunbelt Rentals, Inc. of Chula Vista. The crane operator from ACB-1 did an outstanding job of positioning this aircraft in spite of the light wind (7-8 knots at times). He was very skilled with the controls, and so precise many times you could not see the movement when in fact he was actually moving that aircraft. The lift strain on the crane's gauges indicated about 16,000 lbs. End result: Aircraft safe on stanchion at 11:47 AM!

Winter 2025
Issue 167

A U.S. Navy TH-57C "Sea Ranger" and a TH-73A "Thrasher," assigned to Training Air Wing Five and flown by instructors from HT-8, HT-18, and HT-28, fly over Pensacola, Florida, on Tuesday, September 12, 2023.

Rotor Review (ISSN: 1085-9683) is published quarterly by the Naval Helicopter Association, Inc. (NHA), a California nonprofit 501(c)(6) corporation. NHA is located in Building 654, Rogers Road, NASNI, San Diego, CA 92135.

Views expressed in Rotor Review are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policies of NHA or United States Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard.

Rotor Review is printed in the USA. Periodical rate postage is paid at San Diego, CA. Subscription to Rotor Review is included in the NHA or corporate membership fee.

A current corporation annual report, prepared in accordance with Section 8321 of the California Corporation Code, is available on request.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Naval Helicopter Association, P.O. Box 180578, Coronado, CA 92178-0578.

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: Build Your Foundation

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Build Your Foundation

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

Throughout each stage of their journey—from commissioning to flight school, Boot Camp to Rescue Swimmer School, or A Schools to learn how to be a maintenance professional, all this training leads to Fleet assignments, and beyond—the Naval Helicopter Association (NHA) is there to support, connect, and advocate for the rotary-wing community. Established to advance the professionalism and skill of rotary-wing aviation, NHA provides a valuable network for mentorship, camaraderie, and career development. It is an organization where members can share knowledge, celebrate achievements, and find guidance on the unique challenges of a Naval Aviation career. Simply stated, NHA is the "base" of the foundation that upholds the rotary-wing community.

NHA plays a vital role in creating opportunities for growth and learning. Its conferences, seminars, and events allow members to stay current with technological advancements and evolving mission requirements, offering insights into professional pathways within and beyond military service. Through these initiatives, NHA ensures that every member of the rotary-wing force—whether on active duty, reserve, or retired—has access to resources that will help them excel.

For those who choose to make the Navy a lifelong career, NHA provides a consistent community that grows with them, supporting transitions into new roles, promotions, and even life after retirement. For those who decide to transition to civilian life before the 20-year mark, NHA remains a bridge to the broader community of naval aviators, aircrewmen, and maintenance professionals helping members stay connected and informed while they pursue new opportunities.

Honoring Families: The Unsung Heroes

The dedication and resilience of naval aviators would not be possible without the unwavering support of their families. The families of the Naval Aviation rotary-wing force—spouses, children, parents, and loved ones—play a crucial role in the strength and well-being of these servicemembers. They endure long deployments, uncertain schedules, and the inherent challenges of military life with a strength that often goes unrecognized.

NHA understands the importance of supporting not only servicemembers but also their families. Through family-oriented events, outreach, and community support, NHA seeks to honor and recognize the contributions of those who stand behind the men and women of the rotary-wing force. It provides resources, community support, and events that bring families together, strengthening the bonds that sustain the rotary-wing community through both triumphs and challenges.

A Legacy of Excellence

The Naval Aviation rotary-wing force is more than just a group of pilots and helicopters; it is a community of individuals bound by a commitment to service, excellence, and each other. Every member—support staff, maintainers, aircrew, pilots, and families—contributes to the success of this community and the strength of the Navy's mission.

From their first days as trainees to seasoned veterans in the Fleet, the journey of a member of the rotary-wing force is marked by perseverance, sacrifice, and camaraderie. NHA remains an enduring foundation for this journey, providing a network, community, and source of inspiration that extends far beyond military service.

Whether they serve for a few years or make a lifelong career of it, every member of the Naval Aviation rotary-wing force leaves a lasting impact. Together, they uphold a legacy that continues to elevate the standards of Naval Aviation, supported by NHA, an organization that remains dedicated to the success and wellbeing of every individual and family who contributes to this remarkable force!

Individually we can be strong. Together we can be invincible!

VR and CNJI (Committed Not just Involved),

Dano

National President's Message

Build Your Foundation

By CAPT Timothy "Buck" Rogers, USN

Greetings from NHA!

We are kicking off the New Year and are very excited for what's in store for 2025. Looking back, 2024 was an extremely high tempo, operationally significant year. There never has been a time in my career where Rotary Wing as a community has been busier or more relevant. This looks to continue into the New Year with CVW-17 just wrapping up COMPTUEX with HSC-6 and HSM-73.

With the increase in the pace of the Fleet, an emphasis on the basics and a reevaluation of how we build our cadre is the focus of this edition of Rotor Review (#167 Build Your Foundation). This hits home and is evident every day from my vantage point as the West Coast HSM FRS CO. The FRS occupies a unique space in Naval Aviation. It is the finishing school to round out our newly minted Aviators coming from Whiting; a place where they are introduced to the Fleet, their T/M/S, and the community they will be assigned to for the rest of their career. Beyond the CAT 1s that start off their Fleet journey at the FRS, it is also where seasoned Aviators re-center themselves after tours away from operational squadrons and flying. They come back to reblue their warfighting prowess and rehone the basics that atrophied while away from cockpit. In short, the FRS establishes and reestablishes the foundation for aviators ensuring they are Fleet Ready. Beyond being necessary, a strong foundation is evolving, requiring the best Fleet aviators to grow and shape it to meet the ever changing needs of our operational environment. It is for this reason that the best of our JOs are continuously detailed here. They bring the latest lessons learned from what's happening in theater to ensure readiness for those headed to sea. As a two time instructor and four time student, I owe a great deal of my growth as a pilot to this collaborative approach to building the various category syllabi I completed and the inter-generational learning that I experienced at HSM-41. To this end, the FRS takes pride in the wins and firsts of the Fleet, knowing that the foundation was set here for the successes and accomplishments achieved underway.

As we look to 2025, I want to highlight some of the great work happening behind the scenes to continue the NHA momentum from 2024:

- 2024 Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In Debrief complete and on to 2025 planning … expecting Fall 2025 as our targeted timeframe.
- Increase in our social media footprint highlighting Fleet operations. Kicking off with "Fleet Friday" on our Instagram feed.
- Tech refresh for our website and Symposium registration portal.
- Full focus on Symposium 2025 "First Off Deck" (14-16 May 2025) at Harrah's Resort Southern California.

Fly Safe and V/r,
Buck

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Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In: A Resounding Success for the NHA Family

By LCDR Brendan "BradChad" McGinnis, USN

The NHA Family continues to grow, thrive, and inspire, as demonstrated by the recent Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In. This year's event brought together aviators, aircrewmen, and supporters to celebrate our shared passion for Naval Aviation and strengthen our community. The Fly-In marked a special milestone with a record thirty-six new Lifetime Members joining the NHA Family, adding new energy to our collective mission.

But the Fly-In was more than just recruitment—it was a celebration of camaraderie and purpose. Attendees experienced the debut of our "Why NHA" video, showcasing how our organization will be introduced to the next generation of naval aviators. This video will now be shown to each Winging Class that graduates every two weeks, alongside presentations by NHA squadron representatives from HT-8, 18, and 28. These efforts offer a powerful first impression of NHA's mission, values, and the importance of becoming part of this unique community. Look for the official debut in January!

Images from the Fly-In

The Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In not only highlighted the importance of NHA's mission but also underscored our commitment to continuously improving the membership experience. As we welcome new Lifetime Members, we're taking deliberate steps to ensure that being part of NHA provides lasting value.

In 2025, we're focusing on several key initiatives, including:

- Refreshing the NHA Website and App: Modernizing our digital platforms to provide a more seamless and user-friendly experience for members.
- Streamlining Registration Processes: Simplifying how members join and participate in events to make NHA more accessible, to include an easier way to add additional events to your registration.
- Enhancing Communication: Improving how we connect with members through better outreach, updates, and engagement across all platforms. Look out for a new and improved Social Media engagement!

These changes are designed to ensure that every member, whether new to NHA or a Lifetime Member, feels the value of being part of this organization.

Together, we're not just celebrating what we've accomplished; we're building a stronger, more impactful community for the future.

On the Horizon: The Max Beep Campaign

As we look ahead, NHA is preparing to launch the Max Beep Campaign for Symposium 2025 in January. This marks the beginning of our annual effort to give back, culminating in our signature big check handouts. We're excited to announce the 2025 Max Beep Award Categories:

Officer Categories:

Production Squadron (FRS / Training Command Squadron): 50+ wardroom ($1,500)
Large Squadron: 30+ wardroom ($1,000)
Small Squadron: 10–30 wardroom ($500)
Disassociated: <10 wardroom (2 free drink tickets at the Flight Suit Social during Symposium for each unit member attending; capped at 10 units, with number of Lifetime Members as the tiebreaker)

Note: SIZE OF THE UNIT WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE NUMBER OF DESIGNATED HELICOPTER AVIATORS ASSIGNED.

Enlisted Categories:

Aircrew Shop: 15 members minimum ($500)
Maintenance Department / Detachment: 15 members minimum ($500)

How Max Beep Will Be Run:

- To enter the competition, 85% of eligible members in the unit must have an active NHA membership
- Achieving 100% participation locks in the prize.
- All memberships must remain active through May 1, 2025 to qualify.

This campaign provides a tangible way for our members to see their support in action while reinforcing the bonds that keep our community strong.

Next year we are initiating a new Max Beep Membership Drive specifically for our Region 5 Training Squadrons during Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-in!

Looking Forward: Enhancing Membership Value and Experience.

Fly Navy and Never Fold!

LCDR Brendan "BradChad" McGinnis
National NHA Vice President of
Membership
724.809.6548
brendan.s.mcginnis.mil@us.navy.mil

HSC-6 2024 Max Beep Winners

JO President's Report

Build Your Foundation

By LT Brendon "McP" Lee, USN

NHA Team,

I had the privilege of attending this year's Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In (GCFFI) that took place the last week of October. Thanks to all of the HMLA, HMH, HSC, HSM, VMM, and VRM squadrons for making the trip down to Pensacola to expose our future force of SNAs to the Fleet. We had about 250 attendees, ranging from retirees, active members, and past members, with a solid amount of new SNAs joining as NHA members. This was a testament to BradChad's Membership Team and the TW-5 instructors who helped make it happen. Big shout out to all of the industry partners who made the trip to NAS Whiting Field to join the party and show our members the perks of being a NHA member and teaching them how to build their early foundations.

In addition to GCFFI, the NHA Region 1 Golf Tournament was held at the legendary Sea N Air Golf Course on Naval Air Station North Island over Veterans Day Weekend, and it was also a huge success. Thanks to CDR Kevin "RW" Ringelstein and his team at HSC-23, we were able to raise over $4,000 for the NHA Scholarship Fund, enabling us to support deserving NHA scholarship awardees. Another big shout out to Sideflare, MWR, and URT for donating some of the prizes for the winners.

As we look toward 2025, preparations for the annual NHA Symposium are in full force. This year's theme will be "First Off Deck" which embraces the nature of our jobs within the Rotary Wing and Tilt Rotor Community. During my time aboard the aircraft carrier, helicopters were always the first ones off deck and flight operations could not be accomplished without a rotary-wing platform airborne. This role plays true to our role in the future fight. We have had a rise in our rotary footprint within the Carrier Air Wing (CVW), and we embrace that role on a daily basis, supporting so many other assets other than ourselves. What sets us apart from the rest of the CVW is our wide array of mission sets to which we train to fight on a daily basis.

Although this year's theme has already been developed, we still fully embrace all feedback and suggestions on how to make Symposium 2025 a success. Please reach out to the NHA Team if you have any forums or events you would like to see developed during this next year. Rumor has it we will be hosting a pickleball tournament as an alternate for the golf tournament this year. Stay tuned!

Very Respectfully,
LT Brendon "McP" Lee

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Executive Director's View

Building Your Foundation Should Be a Constant

By CAPT Jim Gillcrist, USN (Ret.)

As Naval Aviators (pilot and aircrew), we begin building our foundation at the training command and then add to it in the Fleet over the course of our careers. This all starts at NAS Whiting Field, NAS Corpus Christi, and / or NAS Pensacola. In fact, this was the theme of the 2024 Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In (GCFFI) held at Whiting Field from October 28-31.

Without a doubt, undergraduate flight training and skills development during Primary, Advanced Helicopter, Advanced Multi-Engine, and graduate level FRS platform / warfighting training serve to produce the world's best rotary-wing and tilt-rotor aviators. Follow on Fleet experience just refines every aviator and sharpens the sword.

After winging on July 1, 1983, I had the good fortune of flying in eighteen different type/model/series Navy, Marine Corps, and U.S. Army aircraft over a 27-year career. Flight hours and exposure to different aircraft and missions made me a better aviator. Sure, simulated time proved invaluable, but "reps and sets" in the aircraft gave me enormous confidence to execute the mission and return safely to mother. The takeaway is to recognize that we are all involved in building our own aviation foundation and that we add to it with every flight event, even if it is only a ground turn or a .2 hour FCF. Pursue every opportunity you get to fly in your Fleet aircraft as well as others. At GCFFI, I had a chance to jump in the TH-73A Thrasher Simulator with LT Evan "Wish" Key from HT-18. This proved eye opening for many reasons – most particularly, the exposure to an integrated glass cockpit and flight control system. Even with all the recent technology, you still need to aviate, navigate, and communicate. Continuously sharpening these critical priorities in the disciplined environment of Naval Aviation enables us to execute and succeed at sea. It was rewarding to see Navy, Marine Corps, and USCG Student Naval Aviators fully engaged in building their own foundations, receiving simulated and on-aircraft flight instruction from Instructor Pilots, and getting opportunities to fly with Fleet Aviators in various Fleet aircraft. A huge thank you goes out to Training Wing 5 for hosting GCFFI, to the leadership at all the VT and HT squadrons, and to our committed volunteer team who made the four-day event so successful.

Hope you enjoy RADM Brophy's "On Leadership" Column and the "Commodore's Corner" by Col. Krockel – you will NOT be disappointed.

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, Mike, Allyson, or myself.

Warm regards with high hopes,
Jim Gillcrist

"Every Member Counts / Stronger Together"

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

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AWR2 Graham Edgar, USN / LTM #919

AWS2 Nathan Hagestuen, USN / LTM #936

AWS1 Brett Bristol, USN / LTM #941

LTJG Cameron Stokes, USN / LTM #1028

LCDR Jonathan Yaede, USN / LTM #934

LT Gabby Bonowski, USN / LTM #1020

AWRC George Stone, USN / LTM #943

AWR2 Chase Peng, USN / LTM #917

LT Brendon Lee, USN / LTM #1055

AWS1 Rob Wells, USN / LTM #939
& AWS1 Chris Upton, USN / LTM #950

AWCM Stuart Guyette, USN (Ret.) / LTM #1033

AWR2 Daniel Maxwell, USN / LTM #914

AWR1 Edward Galindo, USN / LTM #963

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Build Your Foundation

By LT Samantha "Amber" Hein, USN

Welcome back, Rotor Review readers!

In this issue of Rotor Review, we wanted to build off the theme from the Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In that was held in October: Build Your Foundation. As you'll see in the pages that follow, we wanted to focus on training and the foundation that makes us the operators we are today. Being a member of the MH-60R Community, I am thankful for the rigorous training I've experienced in Naval Aviation. From the now deceased Introductory Flight Screening (IFS) to gaining my NATOPS qualification in the MH-60R at HSM-41, I attribute my success to the instructors, mentors, and friends I had along the way. As you'll see, the pieces in this edition have a similar theme. A lot of our shared success in the aviation community comes down to the people we surround ourselves with every day.

Coming from a small ROTC unit, it took me a while to build my community when I arrived in Pensacola. It wasn't until I was paired with my onwing during Primary Flight Training in Corpus Christi, TX that I really began to realize the importance of passionate instructors. Thanks to my onwing and a core group of friends, I was able to build the foundation for my future in Naval Aviation. My foundation was expanded in my Fleet squadron when I had the opportunity to learn from senior JOPA and world class maintainers. During each assignment, we are able to expand our base and share our knowledge with the future generations of the Navy and the aviation community.

This issue is full of interesting contributions that I hope will make you think about what led you to where you are today. Check out Commodore's Corner to get an update on advancements in the world of Advanced Helicopter Training from Colonel Krockel. After that, learn about expanding our foundation with our allies in a submission from one of our editors, LT Christian "Barney" Lavachek, where he details his time integrating with the Philippine Navy. Finally, get a recap of lessons learned from RIMPAC 2024 in "Flying High with HSC-6."

I hope you love this issue as much as we loved creating it. As always, contact the Rotor Review Team at rotorreview@navalhelicopterassn.org. We'd love to hear from you.

Articles and news items are 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.

Rotor Review and Website Submission Guidelines

- 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.

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 also use the USPS mail.
Our mailing address is:
Naval Helicopter Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 180578
Coronado, CA 92178-0578

Letters to the Editor

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. You can use snail mail too. Rotor Review's mailing address is:

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Our Readers Write:

Hello Rotor Reviewers,

I write to you as a new member and with a different background in that I was a career submariner. I started in a nuclear engineering role, advanced to operations, and spent the last 15 years as an "Ice Pilot" guiding submarines on Arctic missions. The watchstanding principles we relied upon were: integrity, level of knowledge, questioning attitude, formality, forceful backup, procedural compliance, and ownership. I'm sure that these values also carry over into the aviation community as the consequences of failure are equally dire.

Beyond personal accountability to stand a professional watch, we exercised a hyper-vigilance for maintaining our gear in a high state of readiness. This was accomplished through a thorough preventative maintenance program and an endless supply of after watch cleaning and training.

The highest level of scrutiny was given to the systems that were exposed to sea pressure or critical to recovering from flooding. This quality assurance program was known as Submarine Safety Program or SUBSAFE. Unfortunately, this program was borne out of the tragic loss of USS Thresher (SSN 593) on April 10, 1963. The system requires the certification and tracking of all components that are associated with a SUBSAFE system from manufacturing through installation of that specific part, along with higher certifications for the craftsmen who perform maintenance or repairs to those systems.

Another facet that brings heightened attention to detail is "Rigging the Ship for Dive." This is the process of manually repositioning and checking the alignment of hundreds of valves and switches to ensure that the ship can safely submerge. The procedure is then second checked by a qualified officer. The Diving Officer of the Watch maintains the status of all the rigged for dive systems to ensure nothing is forgotten or out of place.

So, it is through that background and appreciation for the hours of training and preparation that you bring to the aviation community that I am honored to join you and support you. My support now comes in the form of providing solutions to maintain and protect your assets from damage from the environment. To swap sea stories or find out more about how to shield your gear from the elements, I'd love to connect. Email me at ryan.hopper@shieldtechnologies.com.

Best,
Ryan Hopper

Building Our Foundation

By RADM Richard T. Brophy, USN, Chief of Naval Air Training

Ok, I'm not going to lie. It's a little intimidating writing an article for Rotor Review when the last three authors are great mentors of mine, but, more importantly, all are helicopter pilots! In fact, looking back over the past few years, every author for this column is a helicopter pilot. As the old joke goes, "How do you know you've met a jet pilot? They told you!" So let's just get it over with. Yes, my primary platform was fighters.

So for those now crossing their arms or putting hands on their hips (I'm talking to you Ben Reynolds), I am trainable. Just ask your Chairman, RADM Dano Fillion, or my first three Flag Aides - Travis, Rooster, or Nightcrawler - all stellar aides and even better helicopter pilots. In 2015, when I was Commander, CVW-9, I talked to a packed Naval Helicopter Association convention in San Diego on the skills a rotary-wing aviator needs to be a successful CAG. I created, with CAPT Ed Weiler, the first Strike Training Syllabus for rotary pilots, and as the NAWDC Commander, I strongly endorsed a proposal by Seawolf to bring the MH-60R to Fallon. My interactions with the Rotary Force have been impactful, and I'm convinced they are making Naval Aviation better.

I am reminded of my CVW-9 CAG staff helicopter pilot who boasted to me while on deployment that he was going to give the most unique flyby EVER. This always raises some concern in me, the old "watch this" mentality. He instructed me to be on the Flag Bridge between the third and fourth go. As I waited breathlessly for this life changing flyby (the preparation took long enough that I started to wonder if I was going to miss all of my lunch), I saw him set up at the bow - hovering. He then asked the Air Boss for an "unrestricted" pass of the Carrier. The Air Boss replied, "Ah, okay." He then flew backwards from bow to stern. I smiled and realized that he may not have impressed the deck crew who were moving aircraft, but no fixed-wing aviator could match that flyby! Getting to that point required a solid foundation of helicopter skills like an understanding of aerodynamics and systems, a finely developed and instinctive reaction to aerodynamic forces, and safety and risk mitigation.

This Rotor Review is focused on building our foundations. We build foundations not to be admired but to provide support and buttress the subsequent structure. A solid foundation is essential to any building. In CNATRA, we truly lay the foundation of Naval Aviation and develop the young men and women in our charge into the Naval Aviators who will take the fight to our enemies. Development starts at CNATRA, but it doesn't end here.

The world is becoming an ever more dangerous place. From the Red Sea to the Black Sea, from the Arabian Gulf to the South China Sea, a significant portion of the world's waterways are unstable. President Xi of China has instructed his forces to be ready for a large-scale conflict in 2027. The clock to this date draws ever nearer. Take the Red Sea, for example. Aviators departing their FRS are quickly finding themselves in the enemy's weapon engagement zone within weeks, and their training is paying off. Now, more than ever, we need the rotary community to have the skills, mastery of their systems, and broad-minded creativity to win our future fights.

U.S. Navy Chief of Naval Air Training, Rear Adm. Rich Brophy, left, is fitted in a CMU-33 aircrew survival vest by Aircrew Survival Equipmentman 2nd Class Steven Sandoval prior to embarking on an MH-60S Seahawk helicopter assigned to the "Merlins" of HSC 3. **U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sara Eshleman.**

The role of the rotary-wing community cannot be understated. Our carrier strike groups continue to evolve, and the demand for rotary-wing aviators and platform versatility continues to grow. Helicopter pilots already account for 45% of Naval Aviators and, with the sundown of the C-2 and the ramp-up of the Navy CMV-22 Community, rotary aviation will only expand. Tiltrotor capabilities have the potential to revolutionize the way the Navy employs its rotary platforms with longer ranges and unique capabilities expanding the envelope for tactical vertical lift.

CNATRA's efforts to provide the most advanced helicopter training in the world are grounded in the helicopter community's identity as a "Swiss Army Knife" that adapts, reconfigures, and, changes, often between fixed-wing launch and recovery cycles, to answer the call for a multitude of diverse missions. From being the eyes and ears of the Fleet on an ocean transit, to providing close escort of the strike group through a strait transit, to lifesaving search and rescue missions, disaster relief, and strike group logistics, our helicopter and tilt-rotor pilots are, and will be, prepared for whatever the enemy throws at us. Rotary-wing versatility and dynamic role

in the maritime environment help explain why you so rarely see a rotary-wing no-fly day.

CNATRA as our aviation foundation has not been without problems. For a 10 year stretch (2012-2022), we produced at a rate of 91% versus 100%, creating a nearly 14-month wait before starting Primary Flight Training. Upon taking command of CNATRA in the summer of 2022, my top mandate was to reduce wait times and get aviators to the Fleet. Every aviator that we didn't wing resulted in an undermanned Fleet squadron. To recover, I directed production to 105%. I leaned on the Instructor Pilots to produce and to keep faith with the Student Naval Aviators waiting in the pools. To keep the foundation from being hastily constructed, I also directed that, although we are increasing production, we MUST create an "equal to or better" aviator. Nothing less would do justice for the Fleet who needs the "Nuggets" to check in ready to fight on day one. Training Air Wing 5 (TW-5) Instructor Pilots vastly exceeded my expectations, by producing 104% in 2023. And in a repeat for 2024, they produced 107%, strongly contributing to the highest production numbers for CNATRA on record.

The foundation extends beyond CNATRA, and last year the Air Boss significantly extended my oversight of the Fleet Replacement Squadrons (FRS). This important change allows for one accountable officer from commissioning through the FRS, or "Street to Fleet," as we call it. This is prescient since the FRS must also produce at 105% or a backup develops, negating all the work in CNATRA and delaying manning the Fleet.

Flight time

CNATRA's historic production metrics are made even more impressive, as TW-5 accomplished this during a platform transition. The TH-73A Thrasher is rapidly replacing the TH-57 Sea Ranger. Despite the growing pains that accompany any transition, TW-5 pursued every lever possible to upgrade and enhance the effectiveness of training such as integrating new high-fidelity training technology, like Virtual Reality and Mixed Reality, as part and parcel of the new platform and curricula. Additionally, and perhaps most notably, our small group tryout program, Contract Operated Primary Training – Rotary (COPT-R), has proven a valuable tool to fast track aviators who wish to fly helicopters as their top choice. The ability to bypass T-6 Primary and pursue rotary training in contract operated aircraft has produced a far more qualified aviator. As an added benefit, this program is faster and comes at a lower cost. This versatility is being leveraged across all of CNATRA.

The most important part of the foundation is our Instructor Pilots. They are the key to success, from quality training of our SNAs to production numbers. Our instructor cadre not only helps us stay relevant with the latest tactical and operational experiences from the Fleet, but they also provide a current pulse of the morale and challenges the Fleet is facing. This kinship with the operational squadrons helps us provide the best-trained nuggets possible. There was no better representation of this bond between CNATRA and the Fleet than the smiles, high-fives, and handshakes seen at the Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In. Upon arrival in Pensacola, the Fleet aviators were greeted by old friends, classmates, former squadron mates, and peers who were preparing the SNAs for the Fleet. CNATRA lays the foundation for all of Naval Aviation, but, in building that foundation, we are training our future copilots, helicopter second pilots (H2P), helicopter aircraft commanders (HAC), department heads, and commanding officers. There is a lot of focus on production numbers, but, ultimately, training and molding students into warfighting Naval Aviators is a profoundly important and personal mission.

I am extremely proud of the hard work and perseverance that the instructors and students of CNATRA have demonstrated during my tenure, and I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the foundations laid by those who came before us. The sacrifice that each individual has and continues to make while dedicating themselves to training is humbling to witness as our organization continues to improve. It is my hope that the aviators we have trained will pass on their enthusiasm for the future of Naval Aviation years from now as they return to us with the lessons from the Fleet necessary to develop the next generation of the greatest helicopter and tilt rotor pilots in the world.

I want to thank you for giving me an opportunity to express my thoughts with you in Rotor Review.

Fly Navy, Prepare to Win.

Build Your Foundation

By Col. Anthony Krockel, USMC
Commodore, Training Air Wing Five (TRAWING 5)

If you are reading Rotor Review, you are more than likely familiar with Training Air Wing FIVE (TW-5) as we train 100% of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard's rotary-wing aviators. If it has been a while since you visited Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field or passed through one of the Helicopter Training (HT) squadrons you might be surprised by all the changes that have taken place where we "build the foundation" of Naval Rotary Aviation.

These past few years as Deputy and Commodore of TW-5, I have had the privilege to witness and oversee generational changes to "Wing Five" South Whiting Field and the Navy's training of our rotary-winged aviators. January 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of TW-5, and, to mark the occasion, my predecessors redesigned and submitted a new insignia for the wing which received final approval and became the official command insignia in the summer of 2023. The insignia is a simple but quite literally "symbolic" change which reflects the widespread evolution underway at NAS Whiting Field.

The TH-57 B/C Sea Ranger, which 99% of the helicopter training community loves to hate, is finally being replaced. After more than 40 years as the Navy's rotary training platform, our fleet of TH-57s is moving on to make space for its successor. The Navy received its first TH-73A Thrasher on June 10, 2021. HT-8 completed their transition to the new airframe in July 2023. HT-18 has winged their last TH-57 student, and HT-28's transition is already underway. With two of our three rotary squadrons converted, more than 100 bright new TH-73s on the line, and the TH-57 sundown planned for December 2025, we are rapidly entering a new era. A workhorse to the end, the venerable TH-57 has helped us achieve record production numbers amid this in-stride platform transition, thanks in no small part to our outstanding squadron leadership, dedicated instructor cadre, maintenance support, and a truly exceptional relationship with the NAS Whiting Field leadership. Remarkably, TW-5 produced 107% of the annual Naval Aviator production requirement for the rotary pipeline in fiscal year 2024.

While the transition to a new platform alone would be a significant change, the TH-73 Advanced Helicopter Training System (AHTS) comes in as a true "training system" upgrade including new simulators, mixed-reality Part Task Trainers (PTTs), desktop training devices, and new facilities. While most of the systems are already onsite and helping to develop and reinforce the foundational tenets of rotary aviation and the specifics of the TH-73s systems and interfaces, the facilities projects are just beginning. The temporary hangar, which currently houses the majority of TH-73s, is just that, temporary. For those who have seen the construction, the drainage updates, and new parking lot at South Whiting Field are laying the foundation for the new combined hangar/maintenance spaces, and simulator and academic classrooms. We expect to break ground on these projects in early 2025.

In addition to these monumental changes, we have also implemented trial programs enabling Student Naval Aviators (SNAs) who volunteer for early selection to rotary, to forgo traditional primary flight training. The Contract Operated Pilot Training - Rotary (COPTR) and Copter Only Replacement Pilot Syllabus (CORPS) Programs offer students the opportunity to replace traditional T-6B Texan II (fixed wing) primary flight training with upfront rotary flight training at a civilian flight school. The focus of the COPTR and CORPS Programs is to reduce the street-to-Fleet time-to-train of these Naval Aviators and provide winged rotary aviators with more rotary-winged flight experience than the traditional path. It is important to emphasize that participation in these programs is completely voluntary. Most students will attend T-6B primary before progressing to their intermediate or advanced squadrons. However, the success to date of the COPTR and CORPS Programs and the potential impacts on the future of Navy rotary training are impossible to ignore.

The COPTR Program takes volunteers post-Naval Introductory Flight Evaluation (NIFE) II and sends them to a contracted civilian flight school for 50 hours of civilian rotary training, including a true "solo" flight. COPTR graduates then return to NAS Whiting Field for advanced rotary flight training alongside their rotary-selecting T-6B primary completers. We are currently in our second year of COPTR. The initial tranche of 48 volunteers (33 USN and 15 USCG) completed Advanced Training an average of eight months ahead of their peers on the normal training track with comparable total flight hours and the benefit of additional rotary experience providing them a true foundation in the rotary-wing community. So far, the program is open to U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard volunteers, but we are working to include the U.S. Marine Corps and potentially our international partners in the near future.

The CORPS Program is similar to COPTR in that the students proceed directly from NIFE II, but it is distinct in that all the CORPS training is done in-house at TW-5. CORPS volunteers proceed from NIFE to one of our HT squadrons (HT-28 to date) for an extended version of the advanced rotary syllabus with additional training flights, particularly in the early familiarization/contact stages, taking the place of the traditional T-6B Primary training. Though this program has its merits, the overwhelming success of the COPTR Program has led this program to be descoped, though it remains an option for student volunteers for whom the temporary additional duty (TAD) to the current COPTR

The first graduates of the COPT-R Program. A total of 48 student aviators (33 Navy and 15 Coast Guard) have volunteered to participate in this rotary-only training pipeline.

training site is untenable or who arrive at TW-5 with previous rotary flight experience.

Regardless of the route taken, T-6B Primary, COPTR, or CORPS, all rotary-wing aviators passing through TW-5 still complete the advanced rotary curricula. TW-5 continues in its solemn mission to uphold the Fleet standards and provide the Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, as well as our international partners and allies, with the quality aviators they expect. Though rotary aviation is ever changing, the common foundations that have been built, tested, and proven at NAS Whiting Field unite us and prepare us for the challenges we face in the cockpit and beyond. I am honored to serve as the Commodore of TW-5 and humbled by the accomplishments of all of you who pass through Whiting Field to earn your Wings of Gold.

The Influence of Command Culture on Training and Readiness in Naval Aviation: A First-Person Perspective

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

In Naval Aviation, I've seen how the culture of command affects everything we do. Being privileged enough to be selected as a Command Master Chief, I've understood that command culture drives mission success and is the backbone of training and readiness. It's the common ground we all stand on, the set of shared beliefs, values, and norms that influences how we approach our missions and prepare our teams. Command culture isn't just about leadership styles or procedures; it's about the mindset and trust that shape how we work together under extreme conditions.

I want to share what I've learned about how culture influences our training, safety, and effectiveness. What's often overlooked is that at each command, the "mini cultures," the smaller environments of every department and division within the squadron, are what really matter and where you can have the most effective impact on your overall command culture.

Understanding Command Culture

Its attitudes, values, and norms are at the heart of any command's culture. For me, this has been about more than just words. Command culture is the overall atmosphere we operate in daily, setting the standard for communicating, supporting each other, and executing our missions. I've been under different types of leadership in my career, and I've seen how leadership alone can make or break a command's culture. The best leaders build work environments that prioritize teamwork, safety, and mission accomplishment, and they create these environments where everyone feels they're a part of something bigger. A sense of purpose and belonging is essential in Naval Aviation, where a single misstep can be catastrophic.

Looking back, I realize now that leaders ALWAYS set the tone. The Commanding Officer often decides what the culture will look like, either directly with their vision and guiding principles or through their actions. I had a CO who took responsibility after a flight that almost had catastrophic consequences and changed his initial command guidance on the spot because he knew it lacked clarity and would lead to mishaps later. That's leadership. Leaders who value open communication and transparency inspire trust and collaboration, and I've seen teams perform their best in that environment. When a leader encourages dialogue and clarifies that every voice matters, it builds a culture of trust that helps us stay resilient and effective.

But I've also served in commands where leaders ruled with a strict top-down approach, and that kind of culture can breed mistrust. It's tough to innovate or adapt when you're afraid of repercussions. In training, where mistakes are part of the learning process, that fear of punishment holds us back. Command culture should be one where we're pushed to learn from every mistake, are encouraged to find solutions together, and where readiness is a team effort.

The Impact of Culture on Training

In my experience, training isn't just a box to check off; it's where the culture of command comes to life. I know this because, like many of us who served during wartime, I saw myself go into reaction mode during high-stress times. In our business, that is precisely what you want from your training. A command that values training and development builds a culture where everyone always tries to improve. That command will make time for training, invest in quality simulators, and encourage everyone to take tactical and professional development seriously. When training is prioritized, we feel more invested in our growth, not just as a person but as a team. This dedication to training prepares us to be mission-ready and capable under pressure.

In Naval Aviation, prioritizing training is crucial to building a skilled, resilient team ready to meet any challenge. Commands that invest in high-quality training resources—like advanced courses, live exercises, and access to diverse training environments—are commands where personnel feel empowered to develop their skills without hesitation. This investment conveys that training is not simply a procedural requirement but a vital part of mission readiness and personal growth. When training is approached with this level of dedication, team members don't merely go through the motions; they engage deeply, actively honing their abilities. Each training session is a building block in their professional journey, preparing them for the reality of Naval Aviation's high-stakes environments.

Knowing that their command prioritizes their development, personally and as members of the whole team, personnel feel a sense of purpose and responsibility, translating to heightened motivation and commitment. This culture of continuous skill enhancement ensures that everyone learns and retains the confidence and readiness required to perform in critical moments. When it's time to act, they can rely on the knowledge and experience gained through comprehensive, meaningful training, knowing they're as prepared as possible for any mission ahead.

A command culture centered on safety and teamwork is fundamental to Naval Aviation, where mutual support and vigilance are indispensable. In commands where safety is more than a slogan, every member is encouraged to prioritize protocols and assess risks, understanding that safety impacts the whole team, not just the individual. By reinforcing a safety-first mindset, such commands cultivate a proactive approach where everyone feels responsible for spotting and addressing hazards, thus creating a secure operational environment. This culture extends beyond individual actions to foster a mindset that permeates each mission, making safety a shared responsibility. Additionally, commands that prioritize teamwork create a climate where communication and respect flourish.

After a surprisingly short amount of time with this mindset and actions as leaders, personnel learn to rely on one another, knowing they can trust their teammates to perform their roles with the same diligence they themselves would bring. This mutual reliance is especially critical during complex training and real-world operations, where tasks are interdependent, and success hinges on seamless collaboration. In these commands, individuals learn to focus on the mission rather than interpersonal concerns, developing the cohesive unit needed for high-pressure environments. This foundational emphasis on safety and teamwork strengthens operational readiness, ensuring every mission is approached with a unified, watchful, and resilient team.

Readiness in Naval Aviation transcends individual capability, relying on collective adaptability, accountability, and resilience to respond effectively in high-stress, dynamic situations. Commands emphasizing adaptability create an environment where personnel are encouraged to remain flexible and responsive, knowing that each mission may present unique and unforeseen challenges. This culture of adaptability teaches team members to think on their feet, making them more resilient in the face of adversity. Commands that promote continuous improvement help personnel learn and evolve with every mission, seeing each operation as an opportunity to gather insights and enhance future performance. By valuing improvement, these commands create a culture where experience translates directly into operational wisdom, keeping the team competitive and capable amid advancing technology and evolving tactics. Furthermore, accountability is a hallmark of readiness; commands that encourage ownership over roles and responsibilities instill a deep-seated pride in each team member. When personnel feel accountable, they push themselves to meet and exceed standards, contributing wholeheartedly to the team's goals.

This culture of accountability fosters an environment where everyone is driven to excel, resulting in a highly prepared and dedicated team. Adaptability, continuous improvement, and accountability form the backbone of a command's readiness, directly supporting success in every mission and driving positive culture.

The Challenges of Negative Command Culture

While I've seen the advantages of a positive command culture, I've also experienced the challenges of a negative one. A command that operates under fear or complacency can severely impact training and readiness.

Impact on Morale

Negative command cultures lead to low morale. When personnel feel undervalued or disrespected, their motivation to engage and improve suffers. This low morale affects teamwork, communication, and overall readiness. High turnover rates and shortages only add to the strain. A command with a negative culture must work twice as hard to maintain readiness, and often, the personnel bear the brunt of that stress.

Resistance to Change

I must say that with over 113 years in existence, Naval Aviation and its squadrons have a ton of traditions. The Blues, #SSHWFGD, I-Bar, Salty Dogs, Top Gun, etc.… the list could go on. Blending tradition with change is an art form and tends to be something that leaders are challenged by more than any other concept. What we know for sure is in commands resistant to change, innovation stalls, and readiness suffers. There is no easy answer here. Sometimes, traditions become outdated instantly just because of the changing nature of the world. Sometimes, they just haven't been looked at that way before and finally get noticed. The bottom line is that Naval Aviation is constantly evolving, and we must be adaptable. Fix issues that need fixing and don't create problems that are not there. Sometimes, it's okay to wait and see. Commands that solely cling to tradition and resist change can quickly become outdated, affecting training and operational readiness. Commands that underreact first take time to gather all the facts and data, consider the human factor, and then make intelligent decisions based on that information, embracing change, and staying effective by evolving with new technologies and tactics.

Strategies for Fostering a Positive Command Culture

Creating a positive command culture isn't always easy and always takes time, but it's worth the effort. Here are a few strategies that, in my experience, foster a culture that enhances training and readiness:

Promote Open Transparent Communication

Open and transparent communication is essential. Leaders should actively encourage feedback, not let their egos get in the way, and create channels for personnel to share ideas. When people feel valued and heard, they're more likely to contribute to the command's success. Additionally, leaders who get perspective from all squadron levels are more informed about the real issues. You can't do that when you don't promote an environment of transparency.

Recognize and Reward Excellence

We get too caught up in tradition on this one, and it doesn't help that our sister services have different standards because it confuses the outcome. However, recognizing excellence within the command motivates everyone. Keep it simple and be assured that it doesn't have to be in front of the whole squadron; it can be just recognizing a hard worker amongst their closest peers. Ultimately, celebrating individual and team accomplishments builds a culture of pride and inspires us to strive for excellence.

Encourage Professional Development

Investing in professional development shows a commitment to growth and improvement. Commands that offer training programs, certifications, and educational opportunities create an environment where everyone is always learning. Ask yourself - what if you reward your best people with opportunities for them to grow and not just a new medal or certificate of achievement? Remember, you're helping the Navy get better, not just your squadron and not just the individual then. All three are what you should be striving to achieve.

Model Positive Behaviors

Make no mistake, junior Sailors watch and learn from the people appointed over them. One of the barriers to this is the non-transparent way we run our squadrons based on traditions and chain of command. Both are usually need-to-know worlds that embrace "rank has its privileges." While I am an "old-schooler" who flew H-3 helicopters to start his flying career, I know and have seen the challenges this mindset creates. I'm not advocating changing the dynamics of all this radically. However, I place extra responsibility and accountability on leaders to show that what they do and say has an effect.

Leaders who do their best to model integrity, accountability, and commitment to safety set a standard for the entire command. When leaders practice what they preach, following suit and maintaining a positive culture is more accessible.

Conclusion

A command's culture is crucial for training and readiness in Naval Aviation. A positive command culture fosters smaller workplace environments where personnel feel valued, motivated, and empowered to excel. By prioritizing training, emphasizing safety, and promoting teamwork, commands can enhance their operational effectiveness.

As someone who's spent over two decades in Naval Aviation, I know the importance of a positive command culture. Leaders need to recognize this and invest in fostering environments where people can thrive. When command culture is positive, it doesn't just prepare individuals for the challenges of Naval Aviation; it strengthens the entire team. In a world where challenges constantly evolve, a strong command culture ensures any squadron is ready to meet those challenges and come out on top.

About the Author

Master Chief "Flip" Griffin is a retired CMC and 20-year Search and Rescue Medical Technician. He was fortunate enough to have been a part of every aspect of the SAR HM Community until his retirement in 2019 from the Navy. He has the unique perspective of being the first SAR HM to stand up a forward deployed carrier-based Fleet squadron SMT Program with HS-14 in Atsugi, Japan, and being TAD in the first year of the 2515th NAAD's existence on Wave 2. He has accumulated over 1200+ hours in various rotary and fixed-wing military aircraft and was selected as the 2009 NHA Region One Aircrewman of the Year. He holds undergraduate degrees in Counter Terror Studies and Military Organizational Leadership and an International Master's degree in Disaster Management & Risk Mitigation. He is a graduate of the CMC/COB Course (Class 161), the Senior Enlisted Academy (Class 198, Gold), and the Coast Guard CPO Academy (Class 200).

What Is the Right Foundation?

By Megan "Megatron" Buriak

Being part of a military family means navigating a life that's filled with both pride and challenges. The constant relocations, lengthy deployments, and the ever-present possibility of change create a unique environment that can test even the strongest families. But with the right foundation, military families can thrive, finding stability amid unpredictability and strength in each other. Below are the topics that can help you and your family "Build Your Foundation."

Communication: Open and honest communication is the cornerstone of a strong family foundation, especially in a military household. Because change is inevitable, setting up routines for talking and checking in with each other can make a world of difference.

Embrace Routines and Flexibility: One of the biggest challenges for military families is finding consistency in a life that's anything but stable. Having daily routines can provide a comforting sense of normalcy. Simple rituals like having breakfast together, reading a book before bed, or taking an evening walk help family members stay grounded. These small routines reinforce a feeling of "home" no matter where you are stationed. With the military lifestyle, flexibility is also essential. Sometimes, the schedule changes last minute, or you're packing up sooner than planned. Being flexible doesn't mean giving up on routines; rather, it means adapting them to fit new environments and changes.

Support: It's often said that it "takes a village" to raise a family, and that couldn't be truer for military households. Building a reliable support network, using resources like Military & Family Support Centers, spouse groups, and community events offer great ways to connect with others who understand your lifestyle.

Mental Health and Wellness: Living a military life can be demanding, and prioritizing mental health is critical for every family member. Parents can sometimes feel the need to "stay strong" for their children, but showing vulnerability and prioritizing self-care is just as important.

Celebrating Traditions: Creating family traditions and celebrating milestones builds a sense of unity and continuity. Traditions give everyone something to look forward to, whether it's a weekly family movie night, a yearly holiday ritual, or a "welcome home" celebration after deployments. These moments remind families that they're in this together, and they create memories that remain, no matter where the military takes them.

Connections Through Deployment: Deployments are often one of the toughest parts of military life, and they require intentional efforts to stay connected. Today's technology makes this easier than ever. Video calls, care packages, and letters are all ways to bridge the distance. Many families create memory books, photo albums, or special keepsakes to remind everyone of shared moments. Before a deployment, setting up routines for communication can help ease anxiety. Decide together how often you'll communicate, whether through weekly video calls or daily texts.

Resilience: At the heart of a strong foundation lies resilience—the ability to face challenges and adapt. Military families are some of the most resilient people out there, continuously adapting to new environments, cultures, and situations. Cultivating resilience is a team effort; it means supporting each other, lifting each other up, and staying focused on the bigger picture.

Being part of a military family isn't always easy, but with "Building Your Foundation," it's possible to thrive. Remember, military families are among the most resilient, adaptable, and resourceful. Each experience, each move, and each deployment only adds to the strength of your foundation.

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

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

Helo bubbas and shipmates, it's that time again: the giving season. Giving Tuesday was December 3rd, but donations are accepted and appreciated anytime.

Since 1993, the Scholarship Fund (SF) has awarded more than $1M in scholarships to more than 500 recipients. Since 2020, the start of the current 5-year strategic plan, NHA SF accounts have increased from $618,000 to $812,000 while awarding $289,500 to 89 highly qualified undergrad, graduate, and postgraduate students including military personnel (USN, USMC, USCG), their family members, and Gold Star families. With costs continuing to accelerate, defraying the cost of college education for our members and their families remains at the heart of our request.

Coming into the annual time of giving, and though funds for the 2025 scholarship season continue to grow, donations are down and some key community relations funding are no longer available. So we are looking at non-traditional sources to raise the $100,000 we need for the 2025 scholarships. To help get us there, I am asking our lifetime members, regular members, our trustees, and traditional sponsors to reflect on the impact those 15-17 awards make on our families and shipmates and make a thoughtful gift to NHA's Scholarship Fund.

DONATE. Your tax-free donation supports our 2025 scholarships, this year at $5,000 each. So:

- Write a check and mail it to: NHA Scholarship Fund, P.O Box 180578 Coronado, California 92178-0578

- Go to our website and use your credit card: https://www.nhascholarshipfund.org/donate/

The NHA Scholarship Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable California corporation: tax ID # 33-0513766.

Thank you for your support. Now to the other story.

I joined the HM-12 Sea Dragons in April 1976, and was immediately detailed to the Operations Department where I was given the responsibilities of the Logs and Records Officer. I shared a desk and duties with a QMSA. We were responsible for maintaining the squadron's plexiglass flight status board, each pilot's aviation logbook (95 of them), and answering various requests for data.

As one of about 20 ensigns (and 25 JGs, 40 LTs, and at least 8 LCDRs), I was glad I had a job, because the Coca-Cola Officer and COMTAC Librarian jobs were also available. I found out that from 0800 to about 1000, the LTs hung out in OPS, looking at the grease board and working hard to influence the schedules writer to add their name to the draft flight schedule.

As a PUI (Pilot Under Instruction) having arrived late in the fiscal year with plenty of TRACOM flight hours (I had all annual minimums), I was low priority. I wasn't going to fly. Then they added a 5th quarter (July, August, September) to realign the fiscal calendar. This meant I got to watch the more senior ensigns, all the JGs and LTs fight for flight time daily until October when the new fiscal year became the flight time equalizer. All this as we transitioned from brown shoes!

My daily routine consisted of sorting out the grease board, and the individual logbooks, preparing the daily flight recap, and chasing down my assistant who turned out to be in the VRC-40 geedunk where he was sleeping off the night before. After lunch, I'd spend a couple of hours deciphering the various chapters of the RH-53D NATOPS and wait to secure for the day. To put it bluntly, I had a lot of time on my hands. So, I drew squadron comics to pass time and chronicle daily squadron life. It took a few months for my covert comics to be noticed. One day though, my department head and one of the extra LCDRs approached me with a task. He said, "Say Arne, I've seen some of your comics. Pretty much on the spot." I thanked him.

He went on, "So can you draw something for us like that creepy cartoonist in the magazines, you know, monster comics. Gahan Wilson?" I said, "I could try. What for?"

"Well, the Skipper said at the department head meeting that we department heads treat him like a mushroom. We keep him in the dark and feed him s***! So, can you do the skipper at his desk, with a giant purple and green mushroom head?"

I laughed along with them, not sensing the warning lights and buzzer going off in my flee or fight lobe. Then I said, "Sure, sir. I'll give it a try."

Doomed unknowingly!!!

I did the comic, replicating the CO's office and torso. I drew in the two LCDRs who commissioned the artwork then added the mushroom head complete with highlighting and coloring.

Then I made a copy and, still sensing no danger, presented it to my department head as requested. The OPS Office was as still as a tomb as they opened the manila folder, then the room filled with raucous, rolling laughter as they took it in.

"This is great," said one. "Looks just like his office."

"Perfect," said the other, "The CO will love it! Let's go show it to the XO!"

UH OH! The growing gravitas of the situation eluded me, then it was back to the logbooks and grease board. Later that day, I was participating in a "hands and feet clear" nuclear weapon loading drill when the XO broke though the perimeter heading straight for me. He brandished the mushroom comic, looked me in the eye and said, "CO's seen this and he's pissed off. You better get up there and apologize."

At that point, I looked up and saw the two LCDRs moonwalk slowly but purposefully across the loading perimeter (I believe this is the first recorded use of the moonwalk) and silently disappeared out the back door of our World War I era hangar, LP-3. Noting they were gone, I said, "Okay, sir. I will get right up there!"

"Don't worry Arne. He hasn't seen it yet. He's gonna love it," he replied.

About an hour later I was walking near the CO's ladder when his secret office door burst open. He stepped over the threshold, barking, "Nelson! Get in here." With an uncommon first name like Arne, I don't get called by my last name very often, so I knew it was bad. He was steamed and brandishing the cartoon. He growled, "Have you seen this?" I replied, "Pretty good, isn't it." Once in the office he shook the paper at me and said, "Sit down!" Visions of the two retiring moonwalkers on the flight line appeared as the CO spent the next 45 minutes telling me how difficult it was to be a CO.

Immediate Fallout: In every FITREP I have received, I could spot where I fit in the competitive ranking: 1 of 10, 4 of 14, etc., except this one. I was buried somewhere in the pack.

Reflection: Later in life I was lucky enough to command a squadron, HC-4 (Gulf War, CNAL Battle E Squadron), and a base, NAS Sigonella (Installation Excellence Award - Navy's Best Base 2000). Lesson learned - don't leave your JO stranded.

Bottom line: Being a CO was an honor, pleasure, and a challenge. But it was not hard.

Application Season for 2025 opened 1 September 2024
Donate: Anytime

Landing Spot Option	Source	2025 Goal & Scholarships	Notes
Spot One	Individual Donations	$20K / 4 Scholarships	Active fundraising is in November / December include fundraising (Charity Golf Tournaments and Giving Tuesday)
Spot Two	Corporate Sponsors	$30K / 6 Scholarships	Annual donations provide up to 6 scholarships
Spot Three	Memorial / Legacy Gifts (HS-5, Big Iron & etc.)	$20K / 4 Scholarships	A single memorial gift or a collective gift recognizing last call for our shipmates
Spot Four	Endowed / in Perpetuity (Ream, Raytheon & Kaman)	$10K / 2 Scholarships	Skim from the 3 endowment accounts. A named endowed scholarship is $100K
Spot Five	Generated Investment income, available if needed	$20K / 4 Scholarships	5% skim of total investment to round up or round off an award

Build Your Foundation

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

Helo Bubbas,

It has been a busy quarter for NHAHS. Here are some of the things we've been working on or involved with:

Veterans Day Golf Tournament

NHAHS and NHASF teamed-up to sponsor another successful Charity Golf Tournament at NBC/NASNI Sea and Air Golf Course over the Veteran's Day Weekend on Friday, November 8, 2024. The Region One President, CDR Kevin Ringlestein, USN, the XO of the Wildcards of HSC-23, and his group of motivated JO's put on a great tournament and a good time was had by all. Thank you to all those who helped plan and execute the tournament and raise money for the Historical Society and Scholarship Fund.

The 2024 Mark Starr Award

The 2024 Mark Starr Award was presented to CAPT Earle Rogers, USN (Ret.) by several senior members of NHA in connection with the 2024 Fleet Fly In including RADM Gary Jones, USN (Ret.), Chairman of National Flight Academy (NFA), RADM Dan Fillion, USN (Ret.), Chaiman of NHA, RADM Kyle Cozad, USN (Ret.), President and CEO of the National Naval Aviation Museum (NNAM), CAPT Ed Driscoll, USN (Ret.), CAPT Shawn Malone, USN (Ret.) from Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin Company, and CAPT Sandy Clark, USN (Ret.), NHA Principal Trustee. There were also many other members from the NNAM Board of Directors that Earle worked with over the years, in attendance for a ceremony, which was held at the National Flight Academy Conference Room at the end of their staff meeting. CAPT Rogers was accompanied by his wife and several members of his family. CAPT Clark said "Earle related how he had been Mark Starr's copilot in his first squadron, so the honor was more than a name, it was personal. While Earle was not as mobile as he would like to be, he was sharp, quick witted, and the same man we all admired and loved being around. A wonderful event!"

Lassen SH-60 F Update

SH-60F left the FRCSW Hangar 325 with mounting bracket attached, and was moved to Hangar 340 in the Double Domes in November.

The final preparations to be mounted at the front gate were completed in December.

Installed the transmission water dam, blade tie-downs, rotor system locks for main/tail rotors, mounted the torpedo, did touch-up paint, washed/waxed, etc.).

Crane Practice was performed on December 3, 2024 in preparation to mount the SH-60F on the stanchion on Saturday, January 11, 2025 at the Naval Base Coronado VADM Stockdale Gate.

Completed the Brick Order - Bricks can still be ordered online at https://www.nhahistoricalsociety.org/donations/.

A Great Gift for Valentines Day! Get yours today.

4" x 8" Brick $125
8" x 8" Brick $275
12" x 12" Brick $525

The next order of Commenorative Bricks will be submitted on 21 Feb 2025 and set when they are received.

Mounting Summary

The Lassen Aircraft was lifted on Saturday, 11 January 2025 on what was a perfect day in San Diego. Blue skies and literally no wind. The anemometer on top of the crane was stopped or occasionally just spun infrequently…we could not have had better conditions for the lift. After 5+ hours of preparations which included towing the aircraft to the front gate and through the truck lane, onto Alameda Boulevard and then back into position in the truck lane, lined up with the nose pointing down 3rd Avenue, we were ready for the lift. The Sea Bees from ACB-1 from NAB Coronado provided the crane and the personnel to accomplish the lift. The aircraft took off for her final flight and touched down on the top of the stanchion for what was a perfect landing atop the ring of 10 threaded rods exactly at 11:47AM pacific time. It was a wonderful site and a perfect ending to what was 4 years of detailed work with multiple agencies to get this accomplished. If I don't say so myself, it is an impressive site, nicely complements the VADM Stockdalle Memorial, is another MoH Monument to honor Clyde and his crew, is long overdue, should have been done years ago, is a wonderful tribute to our Navy, Naval Aviation, the Helicopter Community, the base, the cities of Coronado and San Deigo, and the 35,000 people who work on the base to support Rotary Wing Aviation on what is this Master Helicopter Base. "That is all I have to say about that"…as Forrest Gump once said. Thank you to all those who participated or contributed to this effort as we would not have been able to accomplish this feat without your support. Commemorative bricks are still available and will be into the future as long as there is physical space at the base of the monument, as the blank bricks can be replaced with those that you may want to order. Contact the NHA Office or place your orders online. As for me…I am taking a break.

CDR Clyde E. Lasen Medal of Honor Memorial Dedication Ceremony

The Lassen Memorial Medal of Honor Ceremony was held in the Lowry Theatre on Saturda, 25 January 2025 at 1000. The event was moved from the front gate to the base theater due to Force Protection/Security Changes made after the terrorist bombing in New Orleans. RADM Gary Jones was the keynote speaker for the event. Base Co, CAPT Monte Montero, USN accepted the gift from NHAHS, and the Air Boss also addressed the crowd of over 500+ people who were in attendance.

Lassen Mt. Soledad Plaque Dedication Ceremony

The Plaque Dedication Ceremony and Fly Over for this ceremony was held Sunday 26 January 2025 at 1300

We had a good turn out for the ceremony. CAPT Jeff "JMEL" Melody MC'ed the ceremony and CAPT Sandy Cark was the guest speaker at the Mt Soledad ceremony dedicating the Lassen Crew plaque. This was the 32nd MoH plaque placed at the Mt. Soledad Memorial.

The crews from HSC-3 and HSM-41 did a nice flyover and everyone in attendance was duly impressed. A special thank you goes out to LT Dean Benson, USN.

Flag Circle Update

All the helicopters to include H-2 Seasprite, H-3 Sea King, H-46 Sea Knight, and SH-60B Seahawk, and mounting stanchions have been restored/repainted. That is five (5) helicopters (including the SH-60F Oceanhawk) that have been restored to their glory on the base in the last 7 months. Thank you to all those personnel who were involved with restoring the aircraft and making them look great again! A big shout out to the USS Midway Hangar 805, all the volunteers and Chief Douglas from HSC-3 who led the coordination efforts and managed the teams to complete the restoration work of all the helicopters and their stanchions. Great work Chief…thank you!

It is the end of another year. 2025 promises to be an exciting year with many things for which to be thankful. I look forward to working with you and look forward to the spring and the 2025 Symposium.

Keep Your Turns Up!
Regards,
Bill Personius
CAPT USN (Ret.) LTM-#46, R-16213
President
Naval Helicopter Association Historical Society (NHAHS)
https://www.nhahistoricalsociety.org/
PO Box 180578
Coronado, CA 92178-0578
858-449-1726

Enjoy a Q&A with HM Community Editor: LT Eric "TOD" Mott, USN

Editor since: July 2024

Hometown: Kalamazoo, MI

Location: Norfolk, VA

Past Squadrons/Commands: HM-15 "Blackhawks" for my JO sea tour, followed by HSCWSL "Savages" for my "shore" tour (definitely saw more of the world on this tour than my sea tour). Now I'm back at HM-15 again, writing this from Korea!

Favorite Tour: While short, the thirty-month tour with HSCWSL afforded me a unique position within the NAE to participate in events around the world as an ambassador for the MH-53E, AMCM, and U.S. MCM doctrine as a whole. I am especially fond of the time I spent participating in NATO's Dynamic Move 23-II held in La Spezia, Italy. Aside from the amazing destination and weather, getting to work hard and play harder with some cool people from around the world was a huge privilege.

Favorite EP: Power required exceeds power available. It should be in the EP Chapter of the MH-53E NATOPS, but it's not.

Favorite Color: Green.

Favorite Food: That's a hard decision, but I could eat tacos just about every day.

Favorite Hobby: Latin social dancing: salsa, bachata, etc… Everywhere the Navy's sent me, whether the Middle East, Europe, or the Far East, I've been able to find the scene and have an instant community of locals with a shared passion.

Why did you decide to become a Rotor Review Editor?
I enjoy writing, and when Grudge reached out requesting an MH-53E Editor, I couldn't say no.

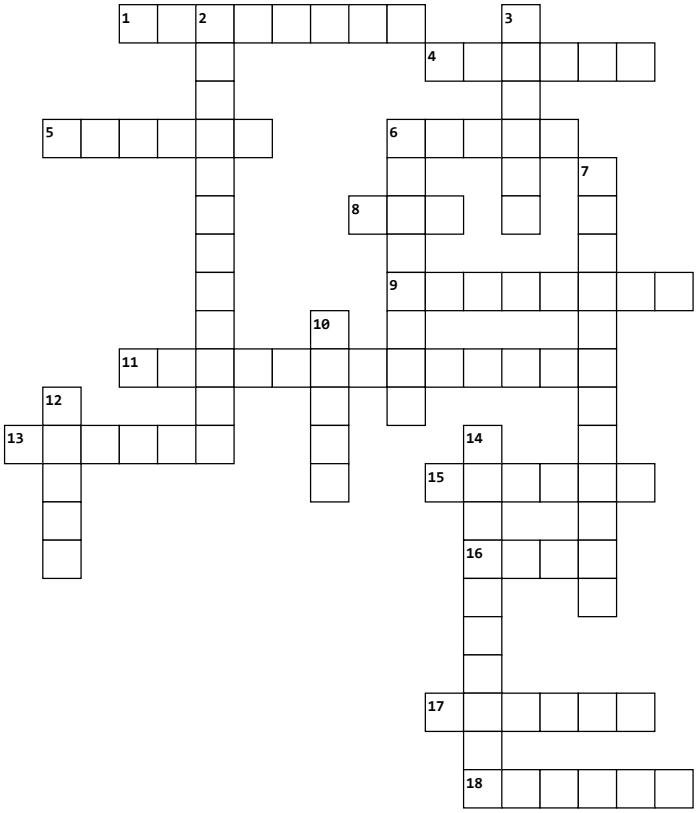
What is your favorite memory in Naval Aviation?
Routinely taking off past my scheduled land time after feeling like I just completed an unscheduled FCF.

What are your goals for the future?
Stay flying! With the sundown imminent for the MH-53E, I can't say what I'll be flying next, but I plan to stay in the seat. Outside of the Navy: grow the side hustle. I recently took the dive into real estate and hope to expand my portfolio while fostering other entrepreneurial pursuits.

Build Your Foundation

Try your hand at this crossword puzzle. Good luck!

By LT Samantha "Amber" Hein, USN



Across

1. A technique used by pilots to practice aircraft procedures and maneuvers on the ground to improve their skills in the aircraft.

4. An experienced and trusted adviser.

5. Location for Advanced Helicopter Training for the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

6. To teach a person a particular skill or type of behavior through practice and instruction over a period of time.

8. Acronym for the squadron newly-winged aviators go to specialize in their fleet aircraft.

9. Designer of the Navy's first helicopter, the YR-4B.

11. A military training operation that involves two or more nations' armed forces working together to improve their interoperability, readiness, and cooperation.

13. A program that aims to improve the safety and combat readiness of the U.S. Navy's aircraft by standardizing the procedures for operating and training them.

15. An aircraft flight or mission (training or combat), starting when the aircraft takes off.

16. Four phase introductory flight training for Student Naval Aviators (SNAs), Student Air Vehicle Pilots (SAVPs), and Student Naval Flight Officers (SNFOs) as part of the Aviation Training School at Naval Aviation Schools Command in Pensacola, FL.

17. A biennial international maritime exercise that takes place in the Hawaiian Islands.

18. Term used in the Navy to describe a new naval aviator or flight officer who has just received their wings of gold.

Down

2. The foundation how helicopters are able to fly.

3. The person who flies with you during your initial flights in a new platform.

6. Name of the replacement for the TH-57 Sea Ranger.

7. The name of the North Carolina base that is home to the Fleet Replacement Squadron for the Marines MV-22 Osprey.

10. Name of the school that provides training for enlisted aircrew and rescue swimmer candidates.

12. Command in Fallon, NV that specializes in naval aviation tactics development and training.

14. Build Your ____.

Answers on page 61

Admiral Holsey Takes Command of SOUTHCOM

By Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Samantha Oblander, USN

Admiral Alvin Holsey, USN assumed command of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) from General Laura J. Richardson, USA during a change-of-command ceremony, November 7, 2024.

Holsey, who previously served as the Military Deputy Commander at SOUTHCOM, was promoted to the rank of Admiral before the ceremony.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III presided over the event at the SOUTHCOM Headquarters in Doral, Florida, with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Charles Q. Brown, Jr., USAF, defense and security leaders from thirty-two Latin American and Caribbean nations, and other dignitaries in attendance.

"We are making history today," said Austin. "The first woman Commander of SOUTHCOM passes the baton to the first African-American Commander of SOUTHCOM."

Holsey's career includes numerous deployments aboard U.S. Navy frigates and cruisers, as well as missions flying the SH-2F Seasprite and SH-60B Seahawk helicopters. He commanded a helicopter anti-submarine squadron; the U.S. Navy's first hybrid electric propulsion warship, USS Makin Island (LHD 8); and Carrier Strike Group One aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70).

"At sea and ashore, the Admiral's teammates have admired his leadership and his work ethic," said Austin. "And those who have worked for him have probably heard him say, 'hard work is authorized.' But he always made time for family as well. He's encouraged his teammates to do the same. His whole career has prepared him for this new mission."

During his remarks at the ceremony, Holsey reaffirmed SOUTHCOM's commitment to strengthen partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean.

"Partnerships are our best deterrence to countering shared security and economic concerns," said Holsey. "We will always be there for like-minded nations who share our values, our democracy, our rule of law, and human rights."

Holsey also warned against evolving threats in the region. "SOUTHCOM is at the front of strategic competition. And our adversaries have established a strong presence, jeopardizing security and stability across the Americas. The People's Republic of China and Russia … seek to undermine democracy while gaining power and influence in the region," said Holsey."Transnational criminal organizations create and exploit this permissive environment while undermining the rule of law and disrupting legitimate government functions.

ADM Alvin Holsey, incoming Commander of U.S. Southern Command, takes the command guidon from Secretary of Defense, Lloyd J. Austin III, during the SOUTHCOM change-of-command ceremony in Doral, Florida, November 7, 2024. **Photo by Erica Bechard.**

Transboundary threats exist as well, from irregular migration, climate change, eroding democracies, to food and water insecurity," said Holsey.

Holsey also addressed the SOUTHCOM Team, committing to "give you everything I have" while asking for each team member's "personal best." "When the dark clouds come, and the days are long, the seas are rough, look no further than right here. I will lead you," he said.

A Georgia native, Holsey was commissioned through the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) Program at Morehouse College in 1988, where he received a degree in Computer Science. In 1995, he earned a Master of Science in Management from Troy State University, and in 2010, he attended the Joint Forces Staff college.

"To understand me, is to understand the essence of survival. Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or be killed. Every morning, a lion wakes up and knows he must outrun the slowest gazelle or starve to death. Doesn't matter whether you're the lion or gazelle, when the sun comes up, you'd better be running. Let's get running Team SOUTHCOM," said Holsey.

Holsey previously made history as the inaugural Commander of the International Maritime Security Construct / Coalition Task Force Sentinel, tasked with ensuring freedom of navigation, adherence to international law, free flow of commerce, and the stability of maritime commons in the Middle East. His career assignments include tours as Deputy Director for Operations at the National Military

Adm. Alvin Holsey, incoming commander of U.S. Southern Command, addresses the audience during the SOUTHCOM change of command ceremony in Doral, Florida, November 7, 2024. **Photo by Air Force Master Sergeant Lionel Castellano.**

Command Center for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel at Navy Personnel Command. The U.S. Senate confirmed Holsey's presidential nomination in September 2024.

General Richardson is retiring after more than four decades of military service as a decorated Army officer and distinguished aviator. Her career included leadership roles in various assignments from the company to the theater level, as well as deployments to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Richardson's career also included assignments as Military Aide to the Vice President at the White House, Chief of Army Legislative Liaison to the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C., and as a U.S. Army Campaign Planner at the Pentagon.

"Over the course of my 38-years in the military, I have received a lot of coaching and mentoring, by so many," Richardson said. "As we all know, in our line of work, people are the greatest asset in the military. And I have been honored to lead and been led by some of the most amazing leaders. I brought these lessons, and many more, with me as I took command here at SOUTHCOM," she said. Richardson assumed command of SOUTHCOM on October 29, 2021 during a history-making ceremony in which she became the first woman general to lead a U.S. combatant command.

"General Richardson, thanks for all you've done to strengthen security and stability across the Americas," said Austin. The Secretary hailed Richardson's accomplishments during her tenure, including the command's support to the Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission assisting Haitian-led efforts in and near Port-au-Prince to restore security in communities impacted by widespread gang violence.

Austin said that under Richardson's leadership, SOUTHCOM conducted numerous operations directly supporting regional security, increased security cooperation with regional defense and security partners and optimized its multinational exercise program to strengthen the region's collective security capacity and bolster interoperability.

Richardson also led the command's critical support to partner nation efforts aimed at disrupting the activities of transnational criminal organizations and malign state actors; including illicit trafficking; human smuggling; illegal, unregulated, and underreported fishing; and cyberattacks.

"SOUTHCOM service members, government civilians and contractors' steadfast devotion to duty has ensured that we continue to deliver on our enduring promise to the Americas," Richardson said. "Thank you for your service. It's been the honor of a lifetime to serve alongside each of you."

SOUTHCOM is one of the nation's six geographically focused unified commands. The command is responsible for U.S. defense and security cooperation with partner nations in the Caribbean, Central America and South America, as well as U.S. military operations in the region.

General Laura J. Richardson, USA, attaches the Joint Meritorious Unit Award streamer to the command guidon during the SOUTHCOM change-of-command ceremony. **Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Samantha Oblander, USN.**

WTI Graduation

By Petty Officer 1st Class Aron Montano, USN

Forty-one naval officers and enlisted personnel graduated from three different Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center (NAWDC) Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) Courses during a joint ceremony held on Naval Air Station North Island, California, November 21, 2024.

The graduates completed one of three WTI courses; SEAWOLF, which focuses on the MH-60S Sea Hawk, SEAHUNTER, which focuses on the MH-60R, and SEAWOLF's Mine Counter Measures (MCM), which also focuses on the MH-60S. Those graduating included 24 pilots, 15 aircrewmen, and two intelligence officers, all representing the Helicopter Sea Combat (HSC) and Helicopter Maritime Strike (HSM) Communities, with each graduate receiving their respective patch during the ceremony.

"Over the last 12 weeks, you have faced one of the most challenging and rigorous courses in our Navy," said VADM Dan Cheever, Commander, Naval Air Forces. "As helicopter pilots, aircrew, and intelligence personnel from both the HSC and HSM Communities, you represent the cutting edge of maritime warfare."

VADM Dan Cheever, Commander, Naval Air Forces, speaks during a joint graduation ceremony for three Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) Courses; SEAWOLF, SEAHUNTER, and Mine Counter Measures (MCM) hosted by SEAWOLF; on Naval Air Station North Island, November 21, 2024. **U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Aron Montano.**

The WTI course is a graduate level, 12-week course hosted in Fallon, Nevada, that develops graduates into tactical and technical experts on their aircraft's systems, weapons, and tactics, techniques, and procedures. WTIs returning to the Fleet are expected to instruct, educate, manage risk, and develop aviators for sustained combat operations at sea.

CAPT Dan Thomas, NAWDC Department Head for SEAWOLF, delivered remarks highlighting the accomplishments of the graduates from the three WTI courses and addressing their contributions to naval aviation and rotary wing operations.

A Royal Australian Naval Aviator receives his patch from VADM Dan Cheever, Commander, Naval Air Forces, during a joint graduation ceremony for three Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) courses; SEAWOLF, SEAHUNTER, and Mine Counter Measures (MCM) hosted by SEAWOLF. **U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Aron Montano.**

"The WTI candidates standing here today have endured robust training environments, at a graduate level mindset, that forces tactical level decision making in the grey, which is the hard stuff," said Thomas. "The result is highly trained and aggressive tacticians who are familiar with all facets of rotary wing warfare in order to dominate our enemies in combat."

The SEAWOLF Rotary Wing Weapons School consisted of 13 total flight events and 326.8 total flight hours. The course focused on weapons employment of fixed forward firing rockets, the 20mm cannon, crew served .50-caliber and 7.62mm weapons, combat logistics, strike coordination and reconnaissance, close air support, combat search-and-rescue, maritime interdiction operations, special operation forces support, and maritime personnel recovery.

SEAHUNTER's 210 total flight hours was coupled with another 224 total flight simulator hours, spread among ten and eight total flight events respectively. Mission areas included mountain flying, antisubmarine warfare, strike coordination and reconnaissance, long range maritime strike, electronic warfare, weapons employment, and surface to air counter-tactics.

The MCM WTI course was comprised of 35 flight hours and included operations with the Airborne Laser Mine Detection System, MK-18 operations with Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit Three, and destruction of mines with MK-65 neutralizers from the Airborne Mine Neutralization System. Additional training heavily focused on planning engagements with the greater Naval Mine Warfare Community.

"The path to earning the WTI patch is challenging, and the work required to demonstrate the tactical ability to expertly employ the MH-60 in all mission areas is significant," said CDR Thad Rusinek, Department Head for SEAHUNTER at NAWDC.

The complex flight events integrated with both U.S. and allied components, including U.S. Navy Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 83, P-8 Poseidon assets, Naval Special Warfare Development Group, U.S. Air Force 34th Rescue Squadron, Royal Australian Navy, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department SWAT Team. Collectively, the courses expended thousands of rounds of ordnance and demonstrated tangible interoperability in pursuit of greater lethality across the Naval Aviation Enterprise.

LT Jessi Ford, a Naval Aviator assigned to Helicopter Sea Combat Weapons School Atlantic, receives her patch from VADM Dan Cheever, Commander, Naval Air Forces, **U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Aron Montano.**

For more information on Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center, visit https://www.airpac.navy.mil/Organization/Naval-Aviation-Warfighting-Development-Center/.

Missile Exercise Mayhem

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

At some point in your career, you will find yourself on a disassociated sea tour, or as I liked to refer to it, my "aviation appreciation tour."

While trying to beat the crowd transitioning from the SH-2F to the SH-60B, I volunteered for what became my third and fourth consecutive sea tours with Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 36 and later DESRON 20. DESRON 36 was supposed to be a one year tour out of Charleston and they would then be stood down. That timing would allow me to beat the rush and transition from LAMPS MKI to LAMPS MKIII.

As things often happen, the plan changed. DESRON 36 closed after my tenth month aboard, and I found myself transferring to DESRON 20 which was on the deck above me in Charleston. I was supposed to do a UNITAS cruise with DESRON 20 but plans changed again. The Atlantic Fleet reorganized and Tactical Destroyer Squadrons would now be permanently assigned to ships and be permanently assigned to battle groups. My UNITAS deployment faded like a mirage, and I was relocated to Naval Station Norfolk where I was doing workups for the Enterprise Battle Group's Mediterranean deployment.

Part of those workups was a missile exercise. My DESRON was responsible for planning and running that exercise. It was in the hands of the DESRON Combat Systems Officer. About three months before the exercise, he convinced the Commodore that since aircraft were involved, it should be run by the Air Operations Officer: me. It was a skillful Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) backstab, but I knew I would survive.

So with three months left, I had to learn how to conduct a missile exercise. I was given a point of contact at Pax River who would be the Range Control Officer (RCO). I learned how to write the messages required to develop the exercise, and I flew to Jacksonville to meet with the squadrons that would be participating in the exercise.

This would not be a normal exercise, it would be the first time the Navy would attempt an over shoulder shot of the Penguin missile from the SH-60B Seahawk. It would also have a P-3C Orion firing Maverick missiles, a S-3B Viking firing a Harpoon missile, and surface ships firing SM-2 missiles. I had to get up to speed on the flight characteristics of these missiles, what range clearance was required for each variant, and the best order to fire them to minimize the chance of a fouled range.

I worked closely with the RCO, developed a firing sequence, determined range clearance requirements, and prepared my brief for the Battle Group staff. As an O-3 who never fired a missile, I was now giving a self-developed PowerPoint brief to the Admiral's staff, all ship and squadron COs, and associated staff involved in the exercise. Everything went well, until one of the ship COs requested to place his ship near the target to photograph missile impacts. I had to tactfully explain that it wouldn't be a safe thing to do in front of the Admiral.

During operational testing, an AGM-119B Penguin anti-ship missile heads toward its target after being fired. **Photo from the U.S. National Archives.**

The Admiral approved the exercise and then I had to deal with the S-3 squadron CO. He wanted to do an over the shoulder Harpoon shot, but the range clearance requirements were going to exceed our capabilities for the time we had available. He wasn't happy, but the RCO and my Commodore overruled his arguments.

I had three concerns that could have scrubbed the exercise. The first was the hulk, a decommissioned ship we used as the target for our exercise. The hulk was equipped with pipes above and parallel to the waterline that sprayed water to provide an infrared signature that fooled missiles into thinking the water sprayed from the pipes was the actual waterline. This would trick the missiles into striking higher on the hulk and thus exit above the waterline on its opposite side. The goal was to keep the hulk afloat to be available for all of the missiles and have it survive to be used again on a future missile exercise. If the artificial waterline was inoperative, the exercise would be scrubbed.

The second concern was a fouled range or not being able to get the range cleared in time for all of the shots. We worked the clearance plan so that the shortest shots took place first and the longer shots that required the most clearance around the target were at the end. A fouled range would scrub the exercise.

The third concern was access to the Air Tasking Order (ATO). The DESRON staff would be embarked on a destroyer during the exercise, and, if we didn't receive the ATO prior to the exercise, we wouldn't know who was who in the zoo and when they were arriving. Failure to receive the ATO was a huge concern of mine. Since I was a LAMPS guy and unfamiliar with carrier air wing structure and side number conventions, I asked for callsigns and side numbers of all the squadrons participating in the exercise during my initial meetings.

After months of briefings and preparations, the big day arrived. The hulk was on station, the RCO was in an EP-3 providing range clearance, and I was in the Combat Information Center (CIC) with the Commodore. It looked like it would be a good day, but then I got word the ship had not received the ATO. I informed the Commodore we had not received the ATO, but I did have squadron callsigns and side numbers so I could tease out who was participating. With that information, the Commodore felt comfortable proceeding with the exercise.

Thirty minutes before the first missile was supposed to launch, the RCO flew by the hulk and found the artificial water line was not spraying water, it was more like dribbling water. The RCO said he felt it would work, but left the call up to my Commodore. We discussed it briefly and he gave approval to proceed. I could tell he was nervous, but he had faith in me so we took the risk.

The Penguin shot was a success. Unfortunately, the P-3 went down in the chocks so the Maverick shots did not happen. The Harpoon from the S-3 failed and impacted the water. The ship fired SM-2s were all successful. The best part was the hulk survived and remained afloat.

That missile exercise, in some ways, described my career: Things didn't always go as planned, but you could either throw in the towel or take a chance at success. My timing was off, I did not get the LAMPS MKIII conversion, but I did get orders to HT-18 which later got me into a Selected Reservist (SELRES) slot. I screened for command but then was grounded for an inner ear issue. The DESRON background got me selected as the Air Operations Officer in the Reserve Component of the NATO Maritime Component Commander in Northwood United Kingdom which allowed me to complete twenty years of combined service prior to being medically retired.

Disassociated sea tours are not always fun, but, if you keep a good attitude and your sense of humor, you can not only survive but you can also thrive in that environment. I have long since recovered from the sleep deprivation I experienced on those tours and still have close SWO friends from my DESRON days.

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. He retired with over 3,600 mishap free hours of flight time. He also holds the unique distinction of wearing five different ranks and holding three different designators while assigned to HT-18.

The End of the TH-57 Era, and the Dawn of the TH-73 at HT-18

By LT Rick "Pickle" Garcia, USN, Instructor Pilot with HT-18

With the shift from summer to fall, the temperatures slowly begin to drop, and a fresh breeze returns to the Florida air—it's a sign that the year is winding down. This seasonal change also brings an earlier sunset, which happens to align with an instructor pilot's favorite time: Night Vision Goggle (NVG) Operations. As the sun sets earlier, so too does the mighty TH-57 Sea Ranger set on its final days at HT-18.

Introduced to NAS Whiting Field in January 1968, the TH-57A Sea Ranger was purchased as the Bell 206 Jet Ranger's replacement for the aging TH-1L Iroquois. HT-8, our sister squadron, initially operated the TH-57A for basic helicopter training. When HT-18 was established on March 1, 1972, its mission was to conduct advanced training and tactics for rotary-wing pilots. However, it wasn't until January 1982 that the TH-1Ls were replaced with a fully instrumented version of the Bell 206, now designated the TH-57C Sea Ranger.

In October 1985, HT-8 and HT-18 became "mirror" squadrons, conducting both basic and advanced training and awarding wings of gold to students. Both squadrons used the TH-57A for basic phases and the TH-57C for advanced phases. In 1989, the Navy purchased forty-five additional Bell 206B-3 helicopters as replacements for the TH-57A to continue primary training under VFR (visual flight rules). This newer variant also carried the TH-57B designation.

Since then, HT-18 has trained and winged Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and international military pilots. The TH-57B taught the basics of helicopter flying—hovering, takeoffs, landings, autorotations, and more—while the TH-57C handled more advanced parts of the syllabus, such as basic and radio instrument navigation, formation flying, and NVG operations.

Over its 55-year career as a workhorse trainer aircraft, the TH-57 helped shape the Navy's next generation of helicopter pilots. It allowed HT-18 to fly more than 600,000 sorties, logging over one million flight hours and awarding wings of gold to over 8,000 Naval Aviators.

While the TH-57 has been a reliable platform throughout its service, 40 years is more than enough time for a replacement to usher in a new era of helicopter training. HT-18's transition to the TH-73A "Thrasher" began during the 2024 fiscal year. The first TH-73A students started in November, and in April of this year, the first TH-73A Naval Aviator earned their wings. It was around this point that HT-18 reached an inflection: an equal number of students were now training on both the TH-57 and TH-73. As the final TH-57 students began their syllabus, the transition was well underway.

LT Rick "Pickle" Garcia and LTJG Brian Golliher conducted the preflight procedures of the TH-57C Sea Ranger prior to executing their Night Vision Goggle training flight.

The number of TH-57 students steadily declined until September 27th, when I had the distinct honor and privilege of flying HT-18's very last student syllabus event.

The student and I walked to the hangar to screen the Aircraft Discrepancy Book (ADB). Afterward, we adjusted our NVGs at the paraloft before heading to the flight line. As we conducted our preflight inspection, I noticed the irony: the sun was setting below the horizon, much like the TH-57's time with us. We were about to complete the student's capstone event—the final syllabus flight of his helicopter training. While flying along the Florida coastline near Pensacola, I couldn't help but imagine the thousands of pilots who had flown the same route in the TH-57 over the past five decades.

As the sun sets on the TH-57 and rises on the TH-73, we must not forget the mighty Sea Ranger and its 40-plus years of excellence and reliability. There may never be another aircraft that serves as faithfully for as long.

A look through Night Vision Goggles of the TH-57C Sea Ranger, as LTJG Brian Golliher is ready to continue conducting Night Vision Goggle Operations. **Photo by LT Rick "Pickle" Garcia.**

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NAVAL HELICOPTER ASSOCIATION

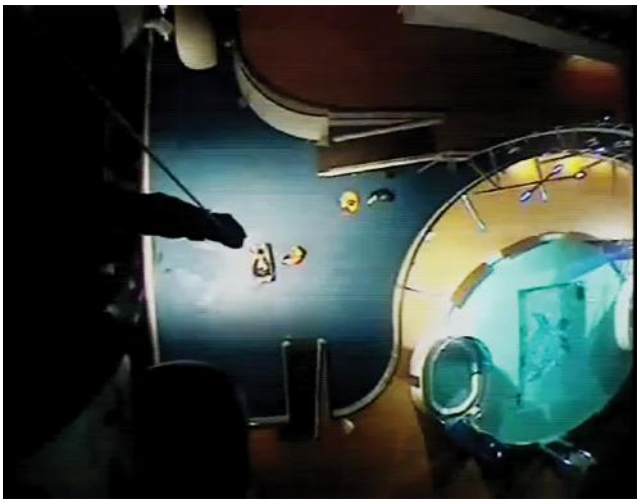
Mental Resilience and Decision-Making in High-Stress Environments

By LT Garrett Hendrickson, USCG

It was a balmy Florida evening on March 13, 2022 at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater when the SAR alarm went off. My crew and I just finished dinner and hurried to muster at the Operations Center to get details about the case. A seven-year-old girl was experiencing acute appendicitis on a cruise ship 330 nautical miles deep into the Gulf of Mexico. The Duty Flight Surgeon said she needed to be at a hospital in four hours or she might not make it. The quickest my crew could possibly do it was five hours.

The rest of this story is filled with challenges familiar to most Naval Aviators: balancing safety and efficiency in a race against the clock, mitigating numerous risks to accomplish a high-gain mission, and a myriad of difficult decisions that had not been explicitly trained in upgrade syllabi. Given the distance and fuel constraints, we only had about 15 minutes to spend on scene. Once on scene, we deployed our Rescue Swimmer to evaluate the patient and prepare her for hoisting. The patient's father would accompany her on the long trip back to the hospital. Just as we had our plan set, the patient's mother asked if she could come too. I had to make a tough and emotional decision in a split moment. We did not have much fuel, and every extra hoist would push us even further beyond the Flight Surgeon's recommended rescue timeline. But the patient was not doing well. What if the worst happened enroute to the hospital and my decision was the reason her mother was not there with her? In mere seconds, my compassion and coherence competed for the answer. No, we would not bring the mother. After hoisting the patient, her father, and the Rescue Swimmer, we began the long overwater transit back to shore. During the flight back, my attention to flying was challenged by fear that I had made the wrong decision.

We delivered the patient to Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida in critical condition. I later learned that just minutes after we dropped the patient off, she went into septic shock. The doctors saved her, and she eventually made a full recovery. If I had delayed her transport to the hospital by even minutes to hoist the mother, we might not have arrived at the same happy outcome. However, the benefit of hindsight is not a luxury we have when making difficult on-scene decisions, and not all missions have the same cheery outcome. This operation illustrated to me how mentally taxing our job can be. The unpredictable and demanding nature of our jobs as Naval Aviators requires not only physical skill and technical expertise but also psychological toughness. In many instances, mental resilience among Naval Aviators can be the deciding factor between mission success and failure.



Coast Guard MH-60T conducting MEDEVAC of a seven-year-old child from the cruise ship Carnival Dream on March 13, 2022.

Across the maritime flying services, but especially in the Coast Guard, we are asked to operate low and close to the water in suboptimal conditions while executing technically challenging missions. We routinely experience significant cognitive load—the extensive mental effort to simultaneously process multiple streams of information in high-stress environments. Deep within the brain, the amygdala is activated, and a complex yet rapid process begins to release stress hormones that physiologically prepare our bodies to react. While this process can provide us with increased energy, alertness, and focus, there are also cognitive consequences. Peripheral awareness suffers. Our working memory is downregulated. We can react emotionally instead of deliberately. And, in some cases, we lose the bubble to the detriment of safety. Training mental resilience is an essential step in developing aircraft commanders who can get the job done, time after time, in high-stress environments. How we train it, though, is less straightforward.

Throughout my upgrade journey from Student Naval Aviator to Flight Examiner, I remember being told that some instructors are harsh on students to create the simulated stress necessary to build mental resilience. While simulated stress is critical to development, I also believe some instructors rely so entirely on ubiquitous abrasiveness they forget why they do what they do. Being an instructional "hammer" is, in and of itself, not the cure to training mental resilience and may be an indicator of simply being an unpleasant person. Intentionally exposing student pilots to increasing levels of stress in controlled environments, stress inoculation, should be a deliberate and measured endeavor. Stress should be applied differently throughout a student's pipeline at pressure points of maturation. Furthermore, stress inoculation should

be used at moments and decisions of consequence, not in a random walk of anxiety-inducing moments. I care more about applying stress to highlight the criticality of a decision gate far more than I care about demoralizing a young pilot for a sloppy traffic pattern. Still, instructors must be cautious of the fine line between stress inoculation and demoralization. After all, we are flying with and training the people we want to replace us and be better than us. Maintaining that balance is one of the tremendous burdens of being an instructor, and it is one that I routinely must self-evaluate to ensure I have not become that which I loathed as a student.

Teaching decision-making models like the OODA loop, and emphasizing crew resource management skills (we love DAMCLAS) are essential for equipping pilots with frameworks for untangling complex scenarios. However, structured decision-making cannot be a complete substitute for intuitive decision-making. Future aircraft commanders must synthesize methodical approaches and trained instincts to make difficult onscene decisions, often far away from the nearest O-5 to decide for them. And once the mission is over, psychologically tough aviators must recognize the need for recovery. Managing post-flight mental fatigue is as vital as managing physiological fatigue. Chronic mental stress erodes effective decision-making capacity and threatens mission success. Instructors should strengthen mental resilience with deliberate stress inoculation during upgrade flights while also recognizing it is not a silver bullet. A solid foundation of knowledge, scenario-based training, mental rehearsal, constructive debriefs, and controlled breathing exercises all contribute to a pilot's "bandwidth reservoir," empowering the mental clarity needed to make the right decisions onscene. Finally, instructors must encourage the appropriate post-flight self-care to sustain a pilot's mental resilience throughout a long, fruitful career.

About the Author

LT Hendrickson is the Command Safety Officer and an MH-60T Instructor Pilot and Flight Examiner at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater.

USCGAS Clearwater - Semper Paratus!

LAMPS Lit - and Lights - the Way

BY CAPT George Galdorisi, USN (Ret.)

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Navy officially launched the Light Airborne Multi-Purpose System (LAMPS) Mk III Program. Almost a decade later, on January 21, 1983, the Navy established the first LAMPS Mk III squadron, HSL-41, at NAS North Island. That milestone represented the culmination of decades of work to put a state-of-the-art rotary wing aircraft onboard the Navy's surface combatants in order to address urgent operational challenges.

Our story begins at the onset of the Cold War, continues with today's MH-60R and MH-60S helicopters supporting the Navy's ship-air team, and is not yet concluded as the Navy considers a new generation of vertical lift aircraft.

Perspective

When most people recall the post-World War II "Cold War" (1947-1991) standoff between U.S.-led NATO and Soviet Union-led Warsaw Pact nations, they typically flash back to the existential fear of more than 50 Warsaw Pact divisions crashing through the Fulda Gap in Germany and devouring Western Europe.

Far less well known is the threat that the Soviet Union's massive submarine force posed to the United States and its NATO allies.

The Yankee I strategic submarine was developed by the Soviet Union in response to the George Washington class of U.S. submarines. **Image courtesy RNoAF 333 Squadron.**

The Soviet Union built over 700 submarines during the Cold War, the majority of which were designed to threaten U.S. Navy ships. The U.S. Navy responded with the establishment of the first helicopter anti-submarine warfare squadrons, HS-1 in 1951, and HS-2 in 1952, and ultimately to the Fleet introduction of the dipping sonar equipped SH-34 Sea Bat helicopter and, in 1961, the SH-3 Sea King helicopter with the AN/AQS-13 Airborne Search & Detection (Dipping) Sonar. Embarked aboard Fleet and antisubmarine warfare aircraft carriers (CVs, CVSs and later CVNs), the Sea King represented a robust hunter-killer ASW platform.

However, this concentration of assets aboard strike and ASW aircraft carriers left the Navy's surface combatants

The Navy's first operational LAMPS (Light Airborne Multi-Purpose System) Mark III SH-60B Seahawk helicopter lifts off from the flight deck of the guided missile frigate USS Crommelin (FFG 37), during flight deck landing qualifications off the coast of San Diego. **NARA/Getty Image.**

completely vulnerable to Soviet submarines, which could launch torpedoes from outside the range of those ship's over-the-side ASW torpedoes or Anti-Submarine Rocket (ASROC)-launched torpedoes. Something was needed to extend the reach of the Navy's ASW weapons.

The initial solution was to adapt a technology that had been in development since the late 1950s to field the QH-50 DASH (Drone Anti-Submarine Helicopter). In April 1958, the Navy awarded a contract to modify its RON-1 Rotorcycle, a small twin, co-axial rotor helicopter, to use as a remote-controlled drone capable of operating from the decks of surface combatants.

In 1963, the Navy approved large-scale production of the QH-50C, with the goal of putting these DASH units on all its 240 FRAM-I and FRAM-II destroyers, as well as the new Knox-class antisubmarine destroyer frigates. DASH was outfitted with ASW torpedoes, the idea being that DASH would attack the submarine with Mk-44 homing torpedoes or Mk-57 nuclear depth charges at a distance that exceeded the range of a Soviet submarine's torpedoes.

By 1970, DASH operations ceased Fleet wide. Although DASH was a sound concept, the achilles heel of the system was the rudimentary electronic remote-control system, which made the system unresponsive to external commands. Therefore, DASH had the annoying habit of random, uncontrolled crashes, or worse, disappearing over the horizon never to be seen or heard from again.

While apocryphal to the point of being a bit of an urban legend, it was often said the most common call on the Navy Fleet's 1MC general announcing systems during the DASH-era was: "DASH Officer, Bridge," when the unfortunate officer controlling the DASH was called to account for why "his" system had crashed into the water.

Moving Forward with Manned Helicopters on Surface Combatants

DASH's failure, combined with a Soviet submarine threat that continued to grow in quantity and quality, presented a challenge for the U.S. Navy: How to find a near-term solution to equip surface combatants with a system that could

DASH (Drone Anti-Submarine Helicopter) the U.S. Navy's new long range anti-submarine weapon system. DASH hovers in free flight over the flight deck of USS Hazelwood (DD 531).

"out-stick" Soviet submarines. Long before the term COTS (commercial-off-the-shelf) became popular, in October 1970, the Navy selected the Vietnam-era H-2 Seasprite to be the interim Light Airborne Multi-Purpose System platform. Referred to as LAMPS Mk I and deployed aboard in-service Knox (FF 1052)-class frigates, Garcia (DE 1040)-class destroyer escorts, and Brooke (DEG 1)-class guided missile frigates, and later other classes of Navy surface combatants, the Navy envisioned that this ship-air team could hold Soviet submarines at bay.

While a COTS (and some would argue, low budget) mashup was just an interim solution (which some wags called a shotgun wedding), the LAMPS Mk I Program performed remarkably well as an ASW asset. One highlight was the operation of the "ASW squadron" in the Mediterranean in the mid-1970s which achieved notable success in tracking Soviet submarines. Importantly, this proof-of-concept demonstrated the tactical viability of teaming a ship and its

Kaman SH-2D Seasprite **Photo by CDR John Ball, USN (Ret.).**

embarked helicopter together to achieve a tactical solution that addressed the existential threat of the Soviet submarine force. LAMPS Mk III and today's MH-60R and MH-60S helicopters might not have reached fruition had it not been for this initial success.

Even with the success of LAMPS Mk I, the Navy recognized that a 12,000-pound helicopter first manufactured in 1959 could not accommodate the emerging ASW systems, sensors and weapons needed to pace the threat. Following assessments in the 1970s of the SH-2D/F LAMPS Mark I and YSH-2E "Short Range" LAMPS Mark III Systems—as well as a YSH-3J "Long Range" modified Sea King utilized to carry larger prototype avionics—the Navy established the LAMPS Mk III Program and conducted a competition in 1974 to develop the LAMPS Mark III System. This novel concept integrated both

Kaman SH-2F

the aircraft and shipboard sensors and systems into a single multi-axis weapons platform.

LAMPS Mk III Evolves

The Navy selected IBM Federal Systems (now Lockheed Martin) to be the prime systems integrator for the LAMPS Mk III systems based on the company's shipboard acoustic processor and sonar suite expertise as well as their electronic systems integration proficiency. This sea change in procurement strategy from the aircraft manufacturer being the system prime contractor was necessary to optimize the required integration of the aircraft and ship systems and sensors. Advances in survivability, supportability, and commonality with the Army's UH-60A Black Hawk aircraft (first delivered to the Army in 1978) led the Navy to select Sikorsky's S-70B design for the LAMPS Mk III aircraft, which was designated the SH-60B "Seahawk."

In explaining the high concept of LAMPS Mk III, the NAVAIR PMA-266 Program Manager, Captain Joseph Purtell, described the ship-air team this way: "Imagine cutting off the front end of a P-3 Orion Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) and putting it up in the air, taking the back end with all the sensor operators and putting it on the ship, and connecting the aircraft and ship with a directional data link. That is LAMPS Mk III."

HSL-41 SH-60B Seahawk over San Diego

As the LAMPS Mk III Program navigated all the wickets that major acquisition programs face, Captain Purtell also needed to address the acronym LAMPS in order to emphasize the fact that LAMPS Mk III was more than just a new aircraft, but a ship-air weapons system. This required some finesse, and as he explained: "LAMPS - Light Airborne Multi-Purpose System - is a bit of a misnomer as this system is much more than just the airborne part. However, we are so used to this acronym that we're just going to continue to use it."

Five YSH-60B Seahawk LAMPS Mk III prototypes were ordered so that this completely new concept could undergo extensive developmental and operational testing. The first YSH-60B flight occurred on December 12, 1979. The first production SH-60B made its initial flight on February 11, 1983, and the Navy accepted this aircraft on September 22, 1983. The SH-60B entered operational service in 1984, with its first operational deployment in 1985.

Concurrent with the development of the LAMPS Mk III System, Captain Purtell recognized that the carrier-based Sea King was nearing the end of its service life and that a new "CV-helo" would be needed. A variant of the SH-60B represented a logical choice, but initiating a new rotary wing program on the heels of the multi-billion-dollar (in early-1980s dollars) LAMPS Mk III Program, was likely a bridge too far. Therefore, the SH-60F carrier-based helicopter was born as an ECP (engineering change proposal) to the SH-60B.

It is not hyperbole to say that the SH-60B LAMPS Mk III Program (and by extension the CV-helo SH-60F Program) represents one of the most successful development and acquisition programs in Naval Aviation history. Over 180 SH-60B aircraft and almost 100 SH-60F aircraft were delivered to the Navy. These aircraft accumulated hundreds of thousands of flight hours operating aboard aircraft carriers as part of the carrier air wing and aboard a wide range of surface combatants in one or two aircraft detachments. Warfighters, from carrier battle/strike group commanders, to warfare commanders across the board, to individual ship commanding officers, leveraged these multi-mission assets proactively to gain a tactical, operational and even strategic advantage over a wide-range of adversaries.

All that said, the story of LAMPS Mk III is more than a story of hardware and software. It is clearly mostly about people. We've already highlighted the contributions of LAMPS Mk III NAVAIR Program Managers like Captain Purtell. These were the individuals who were charged with shepherding the program through the rocks and shoals of the Navy's acquisition process and who had the ultimate responsibility as to whether the program succeeded or failed.

LAMPS Mk III is Introduced to the Fleet

The acquisition community met the Fleet during HSL-41's establishment ceremony when Captain Joe Purtell handed the prototype SH-60B logbooks to Captain Mike O'Connor, HSL-41's first Commanding Officer. Few of us who were there that day will ever forget Captain Purtell's words to Captain O'Connor as he did so: "Take care of my baby."

Operating initially out of a previously empty hangar nestled among NAS North Island's LAMPS Mk I squadrons (the new LAMPS Mk III hangars had not yet been built), the HSL-41"Seahawks" were not off to a roaring start, but rather, one that was slow and steady, starting with two prototype aircraft while waiting for the first production aircraft and with pilots, aircrewmen, maintainers and other personnel arriving over time. Still, every squadron member was energized because they were part of bringing this new aircraft to the Navy.

Early on, Captain O'Connor made several decisions that would help ensure that the LAMPS Mk III Community would have the greatest chance of success.

In order to bring together the best expertise possible, he recruited pilots who had flown the SH-60B prototypes during developmental and operational testing. This was more challenging than it might seem. With any new aircraft introduced to the Fleet, when talented and fast-tracking officers are all brought together in the same squadron, the competition is fierce ("heavy traffic" are the words of art). Some of the aviators recruited might have had a safer road to promotion if they took an assignment in an already established HS or HSL (LAMPS Mk I) squadron. However, most of those officers recruited answered the call.

As the squadron evolved slowly with only a skeleton cadre of personnel and aircraft that were flown one-by-one from the Owego, New York facility to NAS North Island (a thrill of a lifetime for all who had that opportunity), it would have been easy to proceed cautiously when it came to putting LAMPS Mk III detachments aboard new LAMPS Mk III capable surface combatants. Captain O'Connor made the decision that none of these ships would sortie without an SH-60B helicopter. He wanted to ensure that for the Navy, a LAMPS Mk III detachment wasn't a "nice-to-have" but an organic part of the ship's weapons system - as important as radars, guns and missiles - to the commanding officer and ship's company. It was a scramble, but it worked. As just one small indication of this commitment, as these Ticonderoga-class cruisers and

Oliver Hazard Perry-class frigates were commissioned, the squadron flew an aircraft to either Pascagoula, Mississippi or Long Beach, California to be part of the ceremony. This made a huge impact.

No commanding officer wants to have an aircraft accident on his or her watch. However, Captain O'Connor took this to the next level. He explained to the squadron that the SH-60B was just starting its production journey and was competing with a number of other existing and emerging programs for finite procurement dollars. Therefore, any hiccups—an accident, disappointing mission capable numbers, failure to deploy on time—could derail the entire program. That caused all of us to up our game and ensure that we became wedded to the success of the program.

LAMPS Mk III Deploys

As production SH-60B aircraft began to arrive and as detachments began to deploy, there was a steep learning curve that impacted how the LAMPS Mk III ship-air team would evolve. The aircraft was optimized for the ASW (anti-submarine warfare), ASUW (anti-surface warfare) and OTH-T (over-the-horizon targeting) missions. Surface combatant commanding officers used the aircraft proactively to accomplish these and other emerging missions.

By way of rough analogy, most Rotor Review readers likely have seen the movie The Right Stuff which chronicles the early days of the U.S. Space Program, and especially of the Mercury astronauts. Few will forget the scene in the movie where NASA's Dr. Wernher von Braun, in explaining why no window was needed in the Mercury capsule, referred to the Mercury astronauts as "specimens." They pushed back and said that they were "spacemen."

What does this have to do with LAMPS Mk III? A great deal. During the development of the SH-60B, aviators and engineers decided that, with the pilot occupying the right seat and the ATO (airborne tactical officer)/co-pilot occupying the left seat, that their small display screen (about the size of an iPad today) needed to be canted toward the ATO so that the pilot wouldn't be distracted by looking at the screen and inadvertently fly the aircraft into the water. The first production SH-60Bs arrived in this configuration.

An SH-60B Sea Hawk Light Airborne Multipurpose System (LAMPS III) helicopter, from HSL-43, in flight near the stern of the guided missile frigate USS Crommelin (FFG 37). The helicopter is equipped with AN/ASQ-81 magnetic anomaly detection (MAD) gear.

What the developers didn't reckon with was the fact that, just like the Mercury astronauts who insisted on having a window in their capsule, the pilot in the right seat wanted to be in the loop and see everything the ATO was seeing. Since the screen was canted toward the ATO, this required the pilot in the right seat to loosen his straps and lean way over to see the screen. Clearly, this created a dangerous situation, and for the remainder of the SH-60B production run, the screen was flat and not canted.

That small screen led to an unintended consequence as to how the LAMPS Mk III ship-air team operated tactically. As Captain Purtell described using his P-3 Orion aircraft analogy, the high concept for the ship-air team was to put the primary sensor operators and tactical decision-makers on the ship. This made great sense since the ship was a more stable platform, had greater computing power, and this provided the shipboard operators with the wherewithal to make the best tactical decisions.

Aboard the ship there were four additional operators on the LAMPS Mk III Team, each with his individual workstation. This included the REMRO (REMote Radar Operator) who could control all radar functions and view the resulting radar image linked from the aircraft's APS-124 search radar; the ESMO (Electronic Surveillance/Support Measures Operator) who was able to further analyze the information linked from the aircraft's ALQ-142 ESM system and integrate it with the ship's SLQ-32 EW system output; the ASO (Acoustic Sensor Operator) who further analyzed the acoustic information linked from the sonobuoys deployed from the aircraft using the ship's SQQ-89 acoustic processing system; and the ATACO (Air Tactical Control Operator—which is today referred to as the ASTAC, or the ASW/ASuW Tactical Controller), who was the liaison between the aircraft operators and the ship. He was also able to assist in positioning the aircraft to optimize the integrated tactical picture. This group was supervised by the ship's Combat Information Center (CIC) Watch Oficer and Tactical Action Officer (TAO).

The theory was perfect, but the reality was vastly different. Long before "human systems integration" became a familiar term in the development of Navy weapons systems, and as PowerPoint slides created during the LAMPS Mk III development gave way to the actual ship-air team, what happened was a dramatic change in who had the best situational awareness.

This is not aviator bravado, but just something that occurred due to the physical layout aboard the ship and the aircraft. The four shipboard operators were in various locations in the ship's

CIC. They rarely—if ever—got together in a "rugby scrum" to compare notes as to what they were seeing on their individual screens. This led to less-than-ideal situational awareness.

Aboard the aircraft, it was a completely different story. With only one small screen to accommodate all tactical information, everything had to be displayed on that single screen: radar information, ESM information, acoustic information, and tracking information. It is easy to see how this kludging of information led to the best possible situational awareness as all information could be compared and validated and "ah ha" moments occurred as the aircraft crew saw the tactical picture evolve.

What this meant was that instead of—as one wag described it—the only responsibility of the "banana-eating monkeys" in the SH-60B's cockpit was to keep the flying machine out of the water, the helicopter's crew had the best situational awareness and drove the tactical equation. This change in responsibilities within the ship-air team morphed into how LAMPS Mk III aircrews trained throughout the life of the program.

It would take the entirety of this issue of Rotor Review—and perhaps the next issue as well—to highlight all the successes of this program and how the system and community—supporting the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets—evolved from an open ocean ASW platform in the "Cold War" era—to a littoral warfare defensive system to counter asymmetric tactics

An SH-60F Seahawk from HS-14 releasing a Mark 46 torpedo.

in the "Small Wars" era of the 1990s and 2000s. For those who would like to do more of a deep dive, there are numerous articles in Rotor Review, U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, Wings of Gold and other professional magazines that capture that history. And as "extra bonus material," for those living in or visiting the Washington D.C. area, the Naval History and Heritage Command houses the yearly command histories of every LAMPS Mk III squadron.

Transitioning from SH-60 to MH-60 Aircraft

The saying attributed to Benjamin Franklin is: "Nothing is certain but death and taxes." As mentioned earlier, the SH-60B and SH-60F aircraft—and the Helicopter Antisubmarine Warfare Squadron (Light) (HSL) and Helicopter Antisubmarine Warfare Squadron (HS) pilots, aircrewmen, maintainers and other personnel who populated those squadrons—created a great legacy over decades of high performance. However, time and technology march on.

There are few decisions in Naval Aviation more momentous than that involving extending the service life of an existing aircraft or developing and fielding a new aircraft. Numerous factors go into such a decision—all too many to list here. In a nutshell, after decades of service, Navy leadership determined that the cost to "remanufacture" (and extend the life of the SH-60B/F aircraft) was as expensive—or more expensive—than pursuing a new manufacture option to build MH-60 aircraft.

SH-60B firing a Penquin missile

Concurrently, decisions were made to enable the commonality of the H-60 series aircraft to meet the requirements of multiple rotary wing communities throughout the Fleet. Navy rotary wing leaders foresaw the need for a dedicated Combat Search and Rescue aircraft aboard aviation capable ships to offload some of the demands made on the SH-60F which led to the development of the HH-60 series aircraft.

Later, as the U.S. Navy adjusted to the reduced post-Cold War defense budgets in the 1990s and efforts to improve naval warfighting effectiveness and efficiency, the NAVAIR Program Office made the decision to develop and insert a common cockpit design for all current and future H-60 series naval aircraft. The combination of these efforts enabled the development and adoption of a Helicopter Master Plan and Concept of Operations in the late 1990s. As part of this Helicopter Master Plan / Helo CONOPS, the Navy

consolidated HS, HSL and HC (Helicopter Combat Support) type wings in the mid-2000s.

The change reduced the Navy's seven different helicopter types to a more manageable structure, while expanding roles and responsibilities for rotary-winged aircraft. By replacing the aircraft carrier-based S-3B Viking, and by providing additional scouting and offensive / defensive weapons employment options, the plan increased capability and capacity while enabling overall savings through component commonality for training, maintenance, sparing, and logistics.

Viewed from 2024—fifty years after the LAMPS Mk III Program initiation—the Helo CONOPS and "Bravo to Sea" proof of concept deployments in the early 2000s aboard aircraft carriers using SH-60B detachments and an HSL squadron to prepare for the MH-60R might seem like just one marker along the road in the evolution of rotary wing aviation. However, it was more than just a quiet event, it was a generational inflection point—and one that was hugely controversial at the time. It not only resulted in the assignment of two helicopter squadrons to carrier strike groups (CSG), aircraft carriers (CVN) and carrier air wings (CVW), but it also increased the helicopter footprint on the aircraft carrier and the total number of helicopters in each CSG. More importantly to the Navy in the long run, the better integration of the MH-60R and MH-60S squadrons and squadron leaders into the carrier air wings helped the

An MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter from the "Battlecats" of HSM-73 takes off of the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68). **U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Justin McTaggart.**

communities evolve the missions, roles and functions of the advanced, multi-mission maritime helicopter force which led to expanded responsibilities and greater value to the Fleet. The visionary Naval Aviation leaders who worked mightily to put the Helo CONOPS in place deserve a great deal of credit for the success of today's rotary wing force.

This new CONOPS also created new type wings to provide stewardship for Helicopter Maritime Strike (HSM) squadrons flying the MH-60R "Seahawk," and for Helicopter Sea Combat (HSC) squadrons flying the MH-60S "Knighthawk." For the LAMPS Mk III Community, the MH-60R aircraft replaced

HSM-71 "Raptors" was established on October 4, 2007.

the SH-60B aircraft squadron-by-squadron beginning in the mid-2000s. This also involved squadron name changes, with HSL-41 changing to HSM-41, followed by the establishment of the "Raptors" of HSM-71 which was the first MH-60R Fleet squadron next. This transition to MH-60Rs was completed when the last active-duty Fleet SH-60B was retired in a sundown ceremony at HSL-49 on May 11, 2015.

As an indispensable carrier strike group asset, like its predecessor aircraft the SH-60B, the MH-60R is optimized for offensive and defensive operations such as ASW, ASuW, ISR-T (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting), and EW (electronic warfare)—all of which are key to executing the Navy's current Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) concept in support of today's carrier air wings and surface forces seeking to provide integrated and synchronized fires.

For the ASW mission, the MH-60R is the only organic aviation ASW aircraft embarked in aviation and air-capable ships. The ASuW mission evolved from the early Middle East Force Modifications (MEF Mods) made to SH-2F Seasprite and SH-60B Seahawk helicopters that provided missile warning sensors, countermeasures and crew served weapons. The new ASuW mission (on steroids) emerged following lessons learned from Operations PRAYING MANTIS and DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM in the Middle East and Arabian Gulf in the 1980s and 1990s.

During Operation DESERT STORM, SH-60B aircrews controlled frigate-embarked U.S. Army OH-58 Kiowa Advanced Helicopter Improvement Program (AHIP) armed light helicopters. They vectored these aircraft into engagement positions in the Arabian Gulf achieving tactical success. This led to a needed reassessment of the ASuW role for naval helicopters. Capitalizing on the Seahawk's modularity, payload capacity and integrated sensor suite, the Navy authorized the outfitting of SH-60B Block I Upgrade (B1U) aircraft with AGM-119 Penguin (IR) medium range (21 NM range) missiles. Continuing to adapt to changing threat environments in the littorals, the Navy next pursued SH-60B Core B upgraded aircraft with more advanced Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR)/laser designator pods and the ability to employ four AGM-114 Hellfire (laser guided) short range (8 km range) missiles as part of the FLIR Contingency Kit (FCK) and Hellfire Rapid Deployment Kit (RDK) capability programs in the late 1990s. This ASuW capability has further

evolved with the MH-60R, which now boasts the ability to carry a total of eight Hellfire missiles or thirty-six (36) Advanced Precision Kill Weapons Systems (APKWS) 2.75 rockets—to provide strike groups with a defensive punch against Fast Attack Craft / Fast Inshore Attack Craft (FAC / FIAC) in marginal seas, confined waterways, and straits.

It is no overstatement to say that the U.S. Navy's multi-mission MH-60R and MH-60S Seahawk helicopters represent the world's most advanced and capable maritime rotorcraft. More than 500 MH-60 Seahawk aircraft operate today with the U.S. Navy and allied countries. Collectively, both aircraft types have surpassed well over three million flight hours since operations began in the early 2000s. As just one indication of the success of the MH-60R, eight allied or friendly nations have ordered over 100 of these aircraft. For a U.S. Navy with an articulated strategy of: "We fight best when we fight alongside allies," this bodes well for facilitating these coalition operations.

Concurrent with the transition to the new MH-60 aircraft, and as part of the Helicopter Master Plan / Helo CONOPS, was a new (and long awaited) transition as to how these aircraft deployed. While some expeditionary squadrons were retained to provide aircraft to surface task groups or single ships deploying separately (such as the littoral combat ship), the new Naval Aviation model had an entire HSM and HSC squadron join the carrier air wing as part of the carrier strike group and then "farm out" combat elements to the surface combatants that were part of the strike group. As envisioned in the Helo CONOPS, this model put all rotary wing squadron commanding officers in the fight alongside the commanders of other carrier air wing squadrons.

Like their SH-60 squadrons before them, the new MH-60 squadrons are writing their own chapters of warfighting excellence and will continue to do so as long as there is life in the MH-60R and MH-60S airframes. However, this brings us to the obvious question—what is next for a community that we no longer call LAMPS but that we likely still think of in those terms?

Challenges and Opportunities and the Future of Rotary Wing Aviation

The only way to answer this question accurately is to say, "stay tuned." Initial indications are that the Navy is investigating options to extend the life of the MH-60 aircraft fleet to the 2040s or even the 2050s, likely through a service life modernization (SLM) or a block upgrade (BU) program. Analysis will need to occur (such as Fatigue Life Analysis (FLA), Service Life Assessment Program (SLAP), Depot Level Periodic Maintenance Interval (PMI) inspection processes), as well as technology insertion programs for aircraft sensors and weapons systems in order to make data-driven decisions that will determine the ultimate service life of these aircraft.

As the Navy considers what will come next for rotary wing aviation, these decisions will need to be made in a new strategic, operational, and tactical context. Many of these changes are reflected in Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Lisa Franchetti's, Chief of Naval Operations Navigation Plan for America's Warfighting Navy. Among the changes reflected in this—as well as other DoD and DoN documents:

There never has been a time since the end of World War II that more state and non-state actors have been shooting at each other. The rotary wing community saw this—in spades—when, in 2024, the MH-60R combat element aboard USS Gravely (DDG 107) engaged Houthi rebels in an intense firefight in the Red Sea. This attack, or the numerous attacks from ashore by drones, missiles and unmanned vessels against merchant ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in the summer of 2024 are unlikely to be one-off incidents. For decades, the Navy—and rotary wing aviation—have been primarily focused on securing the high seas in order to ensure security and prosperity for the United States, its allies, and partners. Navy weapons systems were optimized for this mission. The next generation of rotary wing / vertical lift aircraft will likely need to be even better equipped to put ordnance on target throughout the operating environment from blue ocean to the littorals as a need-to-have, not just a nice-to-have. The naval helicopter community has a rich history of evaluating offensive weapons employment for its helicopters and of deploying with weapons, such as the AGM-114 Hellfire missile, and leading the way in the evolution of a more offensively minded U.S. Navy.

A too-small U.S. Navy is likely to continue to be stressed to be able to deliver striking power worldwide. Part of the naval aviation plan to increase this firepower is to embark more strike aircraft aboard each aircraft carrier. With flight deck and hangar space at a premium, this will likely mean that MH-60R and MH-60S aircraft will need to again be dispersed among the surface combatants attached to the carrier strike group. This will impact how the ship-air team organizes, integrates and operates, and where it will be important to mine lessons learned from decades of LAMPS operations.

In her Navigation Plan, the CNO addresses: "delivering a quality of service to our Sailors commensurate with their sacrifices" as an important pillar of her goals for the Navy. However, this is juxtaposed against a smaller U.S. Navy increasingly in demand by Combatant Commanders and therefore conducting longer-and-longer deployments, often especially disruptive unplanned deployment extensions. Add to this that carrier air wings have unique training requirements (Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center (NAWDC)) Fallon and others) and the time away from home for helicopter squadrons has spiked and will likely continue to remain high. Rotary wing aviation makes up a substantial percentage of Naval Aviation. Therefore, paying close attention to how this impacts retention and speaking with one voice regarding the negative impact on helicopter

squadrons that have such intense training and deployment requirements should be part of a focused effort to consider changes to Navy deployment policies.

The U.S. Navy has embraced a future where unmanned systems will play an important role in all aspects of naval operations. As one example, the Navy has committed to a "hybrid fleet" of 350 crewed ships and 150 uncrewed surface systems. This is just one dimension of this commitment, which extends to air, undersea and ground unmanned vehicles as well. Future rotary wing platforms will need to be optimized to work with unmanned vehicles—especially unmanned aircraft. This means not just operating in the same battle space but working as a symbiotic manned-unmanned / crewed-uncrewed team.

In much the same way as working with unmanned systems is an important change that should be addressed (and embraced) by the rotary wing community, so too should the opportunities presented by the fact that an increasing number of allied and partner nations and navies fly some version of the SH-60 / MH-60 aircraft. Just flying in the same airspace during exercises does little to leverage the benefits of having these aircraft work together tactically. As the Chief of Naval Operations has stated: "We fight best when we fight alongside allies and partners." The naval rotary wing community is well-positioned to lead the integration with our allies and partners.

The Department of the Navy is "all in" on leveraging big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning in order to win the "AI arms race" against our peer competitors. It is increasingly clear that the Navy will seek ways to insert AI-technologies into as many platforms, systems, sensors and weapons as possible and as quickly as possible. The naval rotary wing community would be well-served to be early adaptors of these technologies.

If there is one takeaway in describing the journey discussed in this article, it is that today's naval rotary wing community has built upon a decades-long tradition of excellence highlighted by the journey from LAMPS Mk I, to LAMPS Mk III, to today's MH-60R and MH-60S fleet, to plans for tomorrow's emerging platforms.

Proven performance has its rewards. Igor Sikorsky would be damn proud of the critical role the helicopter has played over the last eight decades. However, there is little time to pause and celebrate. The time for the naval rotary wing community to move out to maximize its contribution to the Naval Aviation Vision and the Navy After Next is now.

Planning for Tomorrow Today

As the Airwolves of HSM-40 (NS Mayport HSL / HSM Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS)) and Battlecats of HSM-73 (first Fleet SH-60B squadron as HSL-43) approach the 40th anniversary dates of their establishments in 1985, tomorrow's vertical lift leaders will need to use the hard earned lessons from the pioneering eras to expand the capabilities of the ship-air team further as the Navy and industry work together to modernize and potentially extend the life of the Seahawk fleet—as well as prepare for the introduction of the Future Vertical Lift Maritime Strike (FVL MS) family of systems.

Concurrently, as these new capabilities evolve, Fleet operators—from numbered Fleet commanders, to helicopter wing commodores, to squadron commanding officers, to first tour junior officers, to helicopter sensor operators, will need to evolve tactics, techniques and procedures quickly to ensure that these platforms, systems, sensors and weapons are leveraged to ensure that our Navy prevails—especially in the ASW battle against capable peer adversaries.

Additionally, given that many of the MH-60R components and sub-systems were designed or developed in the 1990s to counter an adversary threat through the years 2015 to 2020, and assuming the Seahawks may be serving until the 2040s or 2050s, the Navy will also need to continue to address obsolescence imperatives as well as examine options to modernize key systems for critical missions and roles.

As part of this process, investigations into Hawk modernization research and development projects are being explored by the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard. This involves improved engines, the potential for efficiency gains from new main rotor blades or advanced rotor tips, more capable transmissions, and weight reduction initiatives for the airframe. To enhance warfighting effectiveness, the Navy is also researching improved computer processing power, AI insertion, advanced sensor and systems development, launched effects, advanced teaming and human systems integration to help aircrews manage evolving tasks in order to meet future mission needs.

To achieve the Chief of Naval Operations' vision for the future as embodied in Admiral Franchetti's America's War Fighting Navy and NAVPLAN, as well as the United States Pacific Commander, Admiral Paparo's, guidance for prevailing in the Indo-Pacific theater, future Navy and industry leaders will likely find themselves advocating for and supporting investments prioritizing the development of ship-based vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) uncrewed air systems, as well as for more advanced artificial intelligence / machine learning capabilities. Fielding this modern family of crewed and uncrewed systems will help enable the Navy to put more players on the field and ensure that tomorrow's Navy is ready to conduct "prompt and sustained combat operations at sea."

The author would like to thank CAPT Larrie Cable, USN (Ret.) and CAPT Sandy Clark, USN (Ret.) for their generous assistance in crafting this article.

How the Osprey Changed Air Force Special Operations

By Jim Cardoso, Defense Opinion Writer (used with permission)

Almost 20 years ago, in May 2005, I was among a small cadre of aircrew and maintainers who stood up the first CV-22 squadron in the Air Force, the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Kirtland Air Force Base.

That sunny spring day in New Mexico was a historic milestone, transitioning the Osprey from flight test article to a critical player in the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) combat arsenal. All of us understood our role: to establish the training pipeline so future aircrews could employ this amazing aircraft in ways that, given its unique capabilities, were still not fully envisioned.

It's now almost impossible to imagine a time in the AFSOC without the CV-22 Osprey. The Osprey has been at the forefront of AFSOC's toughest missions since its first combat deployment in 2009.

Difficult choices before the Osprey

But I remember this time very clearly, as a younger officer flying the MH-53 Pave Low helicopter. In those days, we had to make difficult choices when considering which aircraft to employ. Those choices injected limitations into our ability to carry the fight to our nation's enemies. The Pave Low was a rotary wing beast, able to carry special operations forces (SOF) and equipment to the most austere and challenging landing zone. However, like any helicopter, it was limited in air speed, altitude and range.

AFSOC's MC-130 aircraft could carry a lot and go a long way, but they needed some form of runway at the end of the journey. This stark difference injected mission complexity during the attempted rescue of American hostages in Iran in 1980, leading to mission failure and the loss of eight Americans. While that tragedy spurred the creation of AFSOC in 1990, special operations leaders and planners still had to balance these tradeoffs; it's just the way it was.

Enter the Osprey. The CV-22's amazing ability to take off and land like a helicopter, but fly enroute at fixed-wing altitudes, speeds and ranges, is well established. What's less transparent is how it transformed the mindset of commanders and how they could execute their missions. Over the past 15 years, they have grown accustomed to not having to make those tradeoffs. They've had the great fortune of creating plans that previously were simply not possible, leading to untold numbers of missions that could not have happened without tiltrotor capability.

Let's be clear; the CV-22 does not replace purely rotary-wing and fixed-wing assets. Today's special operations commanders need multiple tools in the aviation toolkit for the increasingly complex range of operational challenges they'll confront.

The first operational CV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft lands at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. on March 21, 2005.

In 2005, as the 71st SOS colors were unfurled, the select cadre of pilots, flight engineers and maintainers set out to provide those decision-makers capabilities that were just emerging. We were all eager to start turning concepts into realities, develop and train in the tactics and build the community of aircrew who would eventually take the aircraft into combat.

Although we had an idea of what this might look like, we knew we were dealing with a whole new concept of SOF aviation employment. Since then, it has been professionally and personally rewarding to see what air commandos have since realized with the CV-22 from these beginnings.

Expanded capabilities and capacity

This does not whitewash the cost. To the general public and even some national policymakers, the Osprey is known more for high-profile accidents than the capabilities it delivers for our nation. When a voracious media culture intersects with that of AFSOC's quiet professionals, this is a predictable result. The CV-22 Community is still dealing with a tragic mishap in November 2023, which took the lives of eight precious airmen. When a brother or sister in arms is lost, no one feels it more keenly than their squadron mates.

There's no argument that the Osprey is a complex machine that requires robust training and steadfast maintenance. But it rewards this dedication with unequaled capacity for unique mission flexibility that planners revere and aircrew embrace.

During the suitable stand-down time between the November 2023 mishap and clearance to resume flight operations in March 2024, I guarantee that CV-22 aircrew were not wringing their hands in consternation over returning to flight. They were chomping at the bit to get back out there, to continue honing their skills and readying themselves and their tiltrotor fleet for the distinctive mission sets only they could do.

Approaching 20 years since we stood up that first CV-22 squadron, the Osprey has grown from the budding concepts we envisioned into directions we could not have even conceived. It has not come without a cost; application of special operations forces to defend our nation rarely does. But the necessity for the CV-22 to provide the critical capabilities that other aircraft can't remains as strong as ever.

The men and women who fly and fix it stand ready. I remain honored to have been part of their community and blessed for the chance to help realize the air commando vision for the Osprey.

About the Author

Retired U.S. Air Force Col. Jim Cardoso stood up and commanded the Air Force's first CV-22 squadron. He commanded at the squadron, group and wing level over a 30-year career. Cardoso is currently the senior director of the Global and National Security Institute, a think tank and policy institute located at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida.

Special Report from Industry – Why We (Still) Fly

By Scott Bruce, KBR Flight Operations

For some of us, flying naval helicopters gets in your blood and there is no shaking the challenge and excitement. Fortunately, leaving the service – whether retiring or getting out at the end of your tour – doesn't mean that you have to give up the thrill of hovering forever. The obvious options are flying for the Original Equipment Manufacturers, Emergency Services (police, medical, etc.), or the offshore oil industry. For those of us who don't want to give up working with our service brethren, there are options with perks that are almost as good as being back in uniform; one of which is flying in support of the Navy and Marine Corps as a contractor aircrew. Unique opportunities to fly in a variety of roles are out there, but you must look for them!

John "Noddy" Holder is compact and fit with short hair and a trim, slightly graying beard. He walks everywhere with the deliberateness and intensity of a man on a mission. Officially, he serves as the Chief Pilot for KBR, but he considers that his collateral duty - his real job, his métier, is as a rotary wing flight test instructor at the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School (USNTPS) in Patuxent River, MD. As soon as Noddy opens his mouth, you realize that he's not from this country! His classic British accent and sense of humor tell a unique story. An officer and helicopter test pilot in the Royal Navy, he was the exchange pilot at USNTPS up until the end of his military career. The school relies on a cadre of contractors to augment the active duty and government flight instructor staff, and the school wanted to keep Noddy's expertise so brought him on as a KBR contractor. Twelve years later, he was promoted to KBR's senior flying pilot, but he remains excited each day to rise to the challenge of turning Fleet pilots into test pilots.

A quick look at a few of the pilots and aircrew under Noddy's leadership represents a corps of individuals who thrive on being able to support and give back to the Navy and Marine Corps.

John "Noddy" Holder serves as the Chief Pilot for KBR.

Sid Hatcher joined KBR in 2005 after a 21-year Navy career. He describes his decision to join KBR as similar to why he transitioned to Aeronautical Engineering Duty Officer (AEDO) after his first tour as a test pilot. "I looked at several paths available to me and contemplated how I could best contribute to Naval Aviation - the technology, the tactics, and the people. So, they were both pretty easy decisions, and I am grateful for the opportunity. My role continues to be highly rewarding. Working on new aircraft and systems alongside some incredible teammates, KBR, Navy, Marine, and Civil Service." Sid has supported numerous test programs including Presidential Helicopters and MH-60R/S Programs. Nearly 20 years later, Sid hasn't stayed with KBR this long just for the flying. He explains that the "job" of a test pilot is to support developing new capabilities and help train the warfighters to bring optimum implementation of that capability. But the "role" of a test pilot goes far beyond that. Noting the adage of repeating history if we fail to learn from it, Sid's passion for safety, human factors, and crew resource management has motivated him in other areas. What motivates him the most? "Oh, without a doubt it's interfacing with Fleet operators. Whether they are NATOPS Model Managers, Instructors, or Marine One Pilots."

To a person, every KBR aviator feels the deep sense of honor and the commensurate responsibility to be able to give back to the Navy. We all get here from a variety of career paths, and the journeys have been as varied as they have been exciting.

Jonathan Morel spent 20 years in the USMC flying CH-53 helicopters, about half of those years as a Developmental Test Pilot at Pax River. During his time at HX-21, the helicopter test squadron, he had the opportunity to work on the new CH-53K when it was still in its design phase. Throughout many working groups and simulator events, he was able to influence the design of many aspects of the future helicopter, particularly in the flight control system, handling qualities, cockpit displays and controls, and human systems. Following an operational tour back in the Fleet as a department head, he was then privileged to come back to HX-21 and lead the flight test team just as the newly-built CH-53K test aircraft arrived for its initial developmental testing. When it became time for Jonathan to retire from active duty, the aircraft was only halfway through its test period. After pouring so much of himself into its development and test, he knew he wanted an opportunity to continue to help the test team finish the mission. KBR gave him that opportunity. He was able to smoothly transition into a contractor test pilot role directly supporting the CH-53K Test Team and has continued in that capacity for five years and counting.

Jonathan will tell you that the believes being a part of the KBR Pilot Team is the closest someone can get to being in a military squadron after leaving the military "Working and flying with active-duty test pilots while still being part of the ready room is a great place to be and an amazing opportunity to continue directly engaging with and supporting the operating forces. For current military aviators, both the operational and test types, who love the work ethic, mission, camaraderie, and no-nonsense attitudes of life in a squadron, there's no better place to land after the military than as part of the KBR Pilot Team."

KBR crew flying with VX-1 at China Lake.

Though KBR's specialty remains firmly in the flight test community, not all KBR aircrew are TPS graduates.

Four helicopter aircrew with VX-31 at China Lake have answered the call to keep flying after completing successful 20-year U.S. Navy careers. VX-31 operates Search and Rescue helicopters in a unique U.S. Navy environment that requires a specialized skill not common to most helicopter crews. The four aircrew that fly in both the front and back of the MH-60S Seahawk have extensive high altitude helicopter operations experience and use this experience to provide flight instruction, training standardization, and to stand alert duty positions. The pilots, one with KBR for 12 years, and the other for two years, followed immediately after active duty to positions at VX-31. They are mountain flying experts and their reason for continued service is a resonating call to duty "with a bit of selfishness mixed in." They continue to fly a military aircraft in an extreme environment, pass along skills to the next generation and provide daily rescue alert coverage to the multi-service operators in the China Lake vicinity. Two aircrewman/rescue swimmers also arrived directly after retiring from active duty and have filled similar and critical roles as Helicopter Inland Rescue Aircrew. Their combined experience of over 17 years in the inland SAR environment ensures the squadron SAR team operates smoothly and safely in all aspects of helicopter rappel and hoist operations. The KBR China Lake Helicopter Team provides a stable base of experience where active-duty helicopter aircrew can learn to safely operate in an unforgiving environment.

In the Navy, opportunities to stay in the cockpit get scarce as you get more senior as officers are expected to take leadership roles of increased responsibility. Stubbornly, there are some of us who openly want to keep flying; those of us who desperately hope to have the ever-elusive "perfect flight." Having the opportunity to continue to fly military aircraft as a civilian is a true privilege.

Sean Lawson started his Navy flying career as a rescue swimmer in CH-46s. He then earned his commission as a Naval Flight Officer and flew EP-3 Special Mission aircraft and finished up his career as a Mission Systems Operator on the MQ-4C Triton Development Program. Now a KBR employee, his expertise is so sought after that he is the only non-graduate flight instructor at TPS. No wonder he has a huge grin on his face as he shows up for work each day…in his flight suit!

As for me? Let me just put it this way, several years after retiring from the Navy I couldn't resist the pull and joined KBR as a contractor pilot. Years later, my program was cancelled, and my position went away. I tried to "make it on the outside" in a variety of non-flying jobs, but I just couldn't shake it and got pulled back into KBR for a second time. I come to work each day genuinely excited to help build the next generation of Naval Aviation leaders. 'Nuff said?

About the Author

Scott Bruce is a former Navy Pilot, business owner, and corporate executive. Although he claims to have flown (at various times) props, jets, helos, tilt-rotors, Optionally-Piloted Aircraft and Unmanned Aircraft, flying helicopters remains his primary passion.

From the Deck Plates to Diplomacy: How the MH-60R Community Can Support the Philippine Navy in the South China Sea

By LT Christian "Barney" Lavachek, USN

"Just to let you know, you've been put up for an IA. You leave in two weeks." Those are the words that I certainly did not anticipate hearing after moving my wife and one-year-old son across the country for what was supposed to be a three-year shore tour at the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) teaching young pilots to fly in San Diego. I was eager to become an FRS instructor and train our Navy's newest aviators, pay forward all the lessons my instructors had taught me when I was a Fleet Replacement Pilot (FRP), and spend my time focused on what matters most, my family. I now had to shift my focus and adapt to a completely new challenge: moving to the Philippines as the Pacific Fleet (PACFLT) Operations Planner for a six-month Individual Augment (IA).

The organization I worked for was the Joint United States Military Assistance Group - Philippines (JUSMAG). JUSMAG is a Security Cooperation Organization (SCO) that works with both entities of the Philippine military and their government to provide assistance and coordinate military operations. The head of JUSMAG, the Senior Defense Official (SDO), is a senior Army O-6 Foreign Area Officer and is directly responsible to the U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines. The operations team is comprised of three people: the Deputy of Operations (a Marine O-5), a U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) Liaison officer (an Army O-2), and myself (a Navy O-3).

As the PACFLT OPS Planner on the JUSMAG Team, I also served as the de facto PACFLT Liaison Officer and Acting Maritime Operations Officer and worked closely with the Australian, Canadian, and Japanese Defense Attachés as well as the Territorial Defense Chief working in the Philippine Current Operations (J3) Department. Within the collective State Department Team in Manila, I was one of two officers with shipboard experience and the only one who had landed an aircraft on a ship. I was shocked with the lack of naval experience within an organization that was responsible for a nation that has 7,641 islands. I looked forward to the challenge of filling in the knowledge gaps. I answered questions about ship movements, aircraft launching and landing limitations, and even briefed the Philippine General Headquarters on the capability and limitations of the MH-60R. My knowledge of the aircraft was sound, but my knowledge was limited concerning ship scheduling and maintenance periods. It was integral to the job that I build relationships with other officers on rotation in the region to answer questions that I was receiving from partners and allies. With the help of some extremely knowledgeable and talented people at 7th Fleet, DESRON 15, and DESRON 7, we were able to build a strong network of connections with each other and our Philippine, Australian, Canadian, and Japanese counterparts.

Our priority was to begin working on Multinational Cooperative Activities (MCAs) that were directed by INDOPACOM to occur once a month bi-laterally (US-PHL) and to conduct multinational patrols once a quarter. They were small at first, consisting only of photo opportunities and Division Tactics (DIVTACS, ships maneuvering in formation). By the end of my IA, the once small demonstrations had grown to a multi-day operational patrol including more tactical evolutions like Anti-Submarine Exercises (ASWEX).

The Romeo Community should be chomping at the bit to interface with our rotary-wing counterparts during the operational patrols. The Philippine Navy is eager to conduct its own Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), Anti-Submarine Warfare operations, and VERTREP operations but they do not have our vast wealth of experience, resources, and capabilities. While there are still hurdles to clear before we can share our tactics with our Filipino allies, namely establishing an information sharing agreement, U.S. naval rotary detachments should be creative when working with our Filipino allies. Romeo/Sierra detachments deployed to the Philippines should take every opportunity to share and practice what we can when policy allows. If there is an opportunity for the Filipinos to land their AW-109 or AW-159s onboard a destroyer for DLQs, do it. If there is an opportunity for a dual ship GUNEX on a killer tomato (a floating target), take it. If there is an opportunity to run the RADAR and share contact reports, run with it. There are so many things that we take for granted that are immensely valuable for our Filipino ally. The operational joint-sails are a perfect opportunity to connect U.S. Navy rotary with our Filipino counterparts.

To the Romeo detachments out there who participated in our joint operations: thank you for your flexibility and patience. As an embarked pilot, I remember being frustrated about PHOTOEXs, but I saw firsthand how

your engagement with the Philippine Navy reinforced the United States' commitment to the Philippines and signaled that we stand with our allies and partners in the region. A simple PHOTOEX providing images of our ships and aircraft operating together published in international media shows China, and those sympathetic to China, that their influence on the Philippines is waning and that the Philippines would rather align with the United States, Australia, Canada, and Japan to promote stability in the region.

The JUSMAG OPS Team was also responsible for monitoring the situation within the Philippine Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ). As an east-coast pilot, I had quite a bit of catching up to do regarding operations in the Pacific. Thankfully, I had a few Seahawk Weapons and Tactics Instructors (SWTIs) who kept us on the ball with People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) recce, so I had a fighting chance at identifying a ship's silhouette. Truth be told, I found myself back in Helicopter Advanced Readiness Program (HARP) academics trying to identify ships via their Inverse Synthetic Aperture Radar (ISAR) cuts, it was just on a different level.

Knowing the characteristics and capabilities of the PLAN vessels readily on-hand allowed for information to be passed quickly up the Philippine and U.S. chains of command. With intelligence providing a broader context for how the PLAN vessels normally operated, it allowed key leaders to make timely decisions that determined whether to proceed with a mission or abort. Threat study is something we take seriously. We always want to know: "Am I in the weapons engagement zone? Is that ship able to hit my own ship? What emitters might be coming from that ship?" Those are the same questions key leaders are asking but don't have the immediate knowledge. That's where the Romeo Community fills the gap: we should be on the ground and in the spaces where decisions are made to assist those who will make them.

The biggest threat to the Philippines and their islands are the PLAN's reckless incursions into their EEZ and the potential for an escalation into conflict. These incursions are making international headlines and names like Second Thomas Shoal are now commonplace in U.S. military circles. To the Filipinos' credit, their depth of knowledge is impressive - they know every island that is within the 9-dash line, the American, Tagalog, and Chinese names for each of the islands, and view their sailors as heroes for keeping the PLAN and Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) from occupying these areas. Romeo pilots can speak and think in an ISR role in a staff capacity and are versed in the inner workings of the surface navy. Unlike other parts of Naval Aviation, P-8s or strike community, we have lived and worked aboard the ships that are being requested in the West Philippine Sea. We have seen the daily intel briefings on the mess decks, discussed the schedule with the operations officer, or discussed when that critical aircraft component is going to arrive with the SUPPO. We are familiar with how surface vessels operate and what capabilities they have. That familiarity gives us an enormous leg up; just knowing the chain of command and who is responsible for what onboard can greatly streamline communication. That all starts while underway on detachment; growing a deep understanding of what our surface assets can do in the bigger picture while also operating from the flight deck. This blend of knowledge gives us a unique perspective, making naval rotary pilots an ideal choice to work on a staff or in higher positions of government and decision making.

When I left San Diego, I didn't know anything about staff work or Philippine politics. But, after six months working in an overseas joint environment, it became clear to me: the U.S. Naval Rotary Community will play a pivotal role operationally and strategically; whether launching a helicopter in the West Philippine Sea or on shore working as a liaison officer with the Philippine General Headquarters. The situation in the South China Sea (or West Philippine Sea as our Filipino partners call it) is not getting better. The threat of escalation increases with every resupply mission or every clash with the CCG. We need one of our oldest treaty allies in the region to: 1. Feel like we are committed to their security and ready to assist, and 2. Keep their training tactics, and procedures relevant to deter aggression. The United States does not do it alone. Allies and partners such as Australia, Japan, and Canada have all played a part in the region, all while using their own naval rotary assets. Working together and including the Philippine Navy in rotary exercises will pay dividends to our friends and to ourselves. The U.S. should continue to view the Philippines as a true ally in the region and place Romeo pilots, who have experience at sea and in the air, to assist in making the hard decisions to come in this decade of uncertainty.

U.S. Navy Sailors secure a MH-60R assigned to HSM-35 aboard USS Omaha (LCS 12) during Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Brunei 2024. **U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sean Lynch.**

The Naivety of Flying Cars

By AWR2 Kaleb Mantela, USN

Xpeng released designs of the flying car, pictured, taking flight above The Alps. **Image from Xpeng/Xpeng**

My views are expressed strictly as an individual, and not those of the Department of Defense. As an enlisted aircrewman, I have been sitting in the back of helicopters since I was nineteen. Over the years, I have been experiencing the world from vantage points that only a dozen others get to observe as well. It took me years of training, dozens of lectures, and countless instructors to reach the level the Navy requires of me. This is just to sit and work the instruments in the cabin. This does not touch on the amount of experience and training that naval officers receive to pilot the aircraft. There is a dizzying amount of nuance in aerodynamics that makes flying and driving incomparable. Knowing this, I find it amusing to see startup companies pitching their flying car ideas to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which have classified these flying cars as eVTOLs (electric vertical take-off and landing). Various cities and state legislatures have recognized the potential of eVTOLs and have enacted laws to allow and regulate their use. This has many people in the field of aviation perplexed. There are obvious issues with noise, regulations, and safety that people seem to be overlooking.

The Mother of All Noise Complaints

A lot of people jump at the idea of skipping over traffic in a second just like the Jetsons, or silently gliding throughout the sky like in Bladerunner. However, these conceptions cannot be further from reality. eVTOLs for all intents and purposes are electric helicopters, or gigantic drones. Either way, the amount of energy that is required to generate lift from the rotor blades hitting the air is immense. This process can produce anywhere from 97.2 dB to 106.5 dB of noise. That level of noise is comparable to a rock concert. Repeated exposure above 85 dB causes hearing loss. Since my time as a naval aircrewman, I have experienced hearing loss, and unfortunately my hearing will never come back. Moreover, that amount of sound does not cover most local noise ordinances. An example from Jacksonville, Florida states, from 0700 in the morning to 2200 at night, the maximum allowable noise level is 65.0 dB (the equivalent to a washing machine). Violators may face misdemeanor charges, which can result in fines or imprisonment. Under these types of laws, no one can park their flying car in the driveway. This leaves companies to operate out of designated helipads they call vertiports.

A Jeff Bezos Sky Carriage

Urbanlink, a Miami-based company, has placed 20 orders for Lilium's six-passenger eVTOLs and plans to establish launch pads in upscale locations, including Miami, West Palm Beach, Boca Raton, Fort Lauderdale, and Marco Island. They will operate a mixed route of on-demand and scheduled services, functioning more like a sky taxi. More than likely these “flying cars” are not for you. They sell at price points for the ultra-rich, ranging from $70,000 to a hefty $300,000. Meanwhile, the average American in 2024 is struggling to

afford rent, food, gas, and other necessities. The FAA also has placed strict guidelines like clear flight paths, altitude limits of no less than 4000 feet above urban areas, and a pilot license for anything over 254lbs (a small car weighs around 2,500lbs). These rules are much more in line with conventional aircraft for a good reason.

Flying is Not Safe

August 31, 2021, a routine flight to the USS Abraham Lincoln was underway. Inspection of the helicopter was completed by maintenance and the crew members, so it was signed as safe for flight. The helicopter carried half a dozen people as it touched down on the flight deck. Not long after, it experienced divergent and uncommanded lateral and vertical vibrations. The helicopter rotated left 50 degrees, then right 200 degrees, hitting the flight deck and causing the main rotor blades to detach. The helicopter rolled a final time off the flight deck and into the Pacific Ocean. Five of the crew members were lost. A damper hose, which could not have been seen during inspection, had failed. The investigation concluded that the crash was not the fault of any of the crew members. There is no such thing as a fender bender in the sky. Crashes cost millions, and they can cost people their lives. Some of the worst accidents have been at the hands of experienced crews. You cannot guarantee complete safety when people fly. Companies that swear by an eVTOL's safety are lying. It is a hubris selling point to naive investors and policy makers. Marketing eVTOLs to the average consumer and pretending they are just as safe and easy as a car is pure greed and negligence.

Safety Culture

This was a freak accident, and parts failing that lead up to a mishap like this are uncommon. There are hundreds of maintainers who work day and night and are held accountable for mistakes they make on the aircraft. There are layers of safety embedded within Naval Aviation because of past failures. This has left us a robust safety culture that allows us to complete numerous flight hours and missions. Despite the safeguards, human factors cause 85% of all aviation mishaps. It genuinely does not matter that these eVTOL's have less parts, or multiple electric engines. Even trained naval aviators with thousands of flight hours are not immune to mistakes. Mishaps will increase tenfold if untrained aviators are allowed to take to the skies.

Final Words

Ultimately these are fun brain experiments, but the technology is far from reaching the average person. It is genuinely disheartening to see so many cities across the United States focus their resources on a small and very affluent population of people. Flying cars are a non-issue, and what politicians need to focus on are solutions for the housing crisis, homelessness, fentanyl, and our failing infrastructure, among many other real problems. Until companies can address the noise, cost, and most importantly safety of these projects, cities should not spend any time or money on these experiments. If you're still not convinced, just remember: If you don't like how people drive, you won't like how they fly either.

An attendee checks out a zero-emissions SkyDrive flying car during CES 2022 in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 6, 2022.
Image from REUTERS Steve Marcus.

How Elite Rescue Swimmers Stay Calm in Life-or-Death Situations

By Brian Dickinson

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In 1986, USS Lexington (CV 2) was operating at night in the Gulf of Mexico when it received a distress call from a U.S. Coast Guard dispatcher. A boat had capsized and up to 20 people were in the water, suggested an initial report.

Aviation Rescue Swimmers Bill Gibson and Rick Williamson, plus their aircrew, launched from the USS Lexington in an SH-3D Sea King helicopter toward the area of interest. The crew rigged the cabin for rescue.

Shortly after arriving on the scene and conducting a box search pattern, the left-seat pilot spotted a strobe light flashing a mile in the distance. The pilots approached a life raft with four souls on board, an unexpected sight given the initial intel. The pilots brought the helicopter to a 40-foot hover and lowered Gibson and Williamson into the pitch-black, high-sea state. The pilots then backed off the aircraft to provide space from the ferocious rotor wash for the swimmers to conduct their rescues.

After establishing communication and assessing the in-shock victims in the raft, the rescue swimmers towed the victims one at a time to the hovering SH-3D, hoisting them to safety. As Gibson pulled his final survivor into the circle of thrashing water beneath the helicopter, he gave a thumbs up for the crew chief to lower the rescue strop. At that point, he noticed the helicopter move away from him and his survivor. For a brief moment, he had no idea what was going on as he processed the possibilities. Was there an engine failure? Were they low on fuel? Was there a hoist malfunction?

The horrified Gibson then turned to his left and saw the unthinkable. A 400-foot cargo vessel steaming straight toward them! Without hesitation, Gibson grabbed hold of his survivor and intensely began flutter-kicking to the right of the fast-approaching ship. They were both being sucked under the massive keel as he swam with all his strength. As the cargo ship plowed forward, it created a massive wake of waves, which the rescue swimmer fought with all his strength to prevent them both from being sucked under and crushed.

"Amid the chaos, he remembered his life being eerily calm as he knew it wasn't if, but when they would be hacked to pieces. He just kept kicking."

After what seemed like forever, they finally reached the aft of the ship, where they could hear and feel the haunting, massive three-story-high propellers violently chopping through the night ocean. They were then uncontrollably pulled toward them as the rescue swimmer took a final breath of air and pulled the survivor underwater.

Gibson frantically kicked deep down into the pitch-black ocean as the water-depth pressure crushed their ears. The deafening pounding of the propellers reverberated through the water. Amid the chaos, he remembered his life being eerily calm as he knew it wasn't if, but when they would be hacked to pieces. He just kept kicking. He would never stop kicking. Then everything went completely silent and peaceful. They had both astonishingly made it down and under the cargo ship's propellers. Moments later, they surfaced on the other side of death in the ship's wake. They survived the impossible!

Aviation Rescue Swimmer, Bill Gibson, was in the right place at the right time to conduct a standard nighttime rescue. However, when the unthinkable happened, he had a critical choice to make: When a barge was about to crush him and his survivor, he could have easily released the victim to save his own life. But he chose to do the right thing when it mattered most, never considering an alternative option. Even if that meant dying himself to save another. His unrelenting grit and ability to face his fears exemplify the rescue swimmer motto: "So Others May Live!"

Calm in the chaos

Have you been in the right place at the right time and had the opportunity to make the right choice? Did you make the right choice or did a barrier outside your control leave you paralyzed, unable to make a decision until it was too late? I've experienced every version of the above scenario. I've walked away proud of some decisions and carried shame for others. But in all my experiences, I've learned valuable lessons to help better shape my future.

As a former U.S. Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmer and Mount Everest solo summiteer, I've learned a few things about critical thinking, overcoming fears, and leaning into adversity. During my time served, I deployed twice to the Persian Gulf during Operation Southern Watch, flying countless mission sets. But it wasn't until after my 2011 survival experience in the death zone, where I became completely snow-blind while alone on the summit of Everest, that I started some major self-reflection.

My full experience is described in my book, Blind Descent: Surviving Alone and Blind on Mount Everest. The most common question I've been asked since that horrific event is how I didn't panic at the top of the world. Besides a miracle from God, it really came down to my years of intense military training and experiences as an Aviation Rescue Swimmer. Our training taught us to remain calm in every situation, as panic kills. Every helicopter flight brought the possibility of facing our fears and overcoming unthinkable trauma. The few men

and women who make it through the grueling training are expected to jump from a hovering aircraft into the unforgiving ocean to rescue panicked survivors suffering from shock — who often attack their rescuer, trying to use them as flotation. The Navy program has one of the highest attrition rates because most people aren't wired to operate in such a chaotic and unpredictable environment.

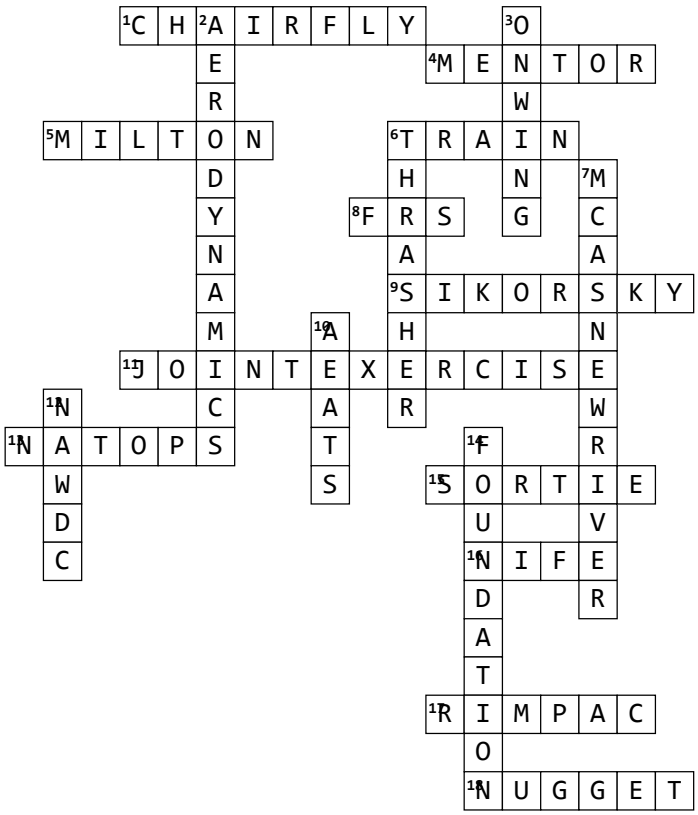
A decade after my Everest climb, and repeatedly being asked the same question about my ability to remain calm, I decided to conduct some research and write another book, Calm in the Chaos: True Tales from Elite U.S. Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmers, focusing on the training and experiences of U.S. Navy Aviation Rescue Swimmers, like Bill Gibson and Rick Williamson.

I also interviewed Aircrew and Aviation Rescue Swimmers spanning from the Apollo 13 astronaut extraction, Vietnam Combat Search and Rescue missions, Hurricane Katrina saves, rescuing the crew from a burning submarine, survivors of helicopter crashes, and so on. Through the unique training and experiences, I've extracted lessons, tactics, and mindsets that can directly transfer to people who are panicking in their own lives. I'm also grateful to have my wife, JoAnna, contribute her wisdom and experiences as a Christian Counselor throughout each chapter to help soften the delivery of the applicable lessons.

Stories like Bill Gibson's represent extreme cases, but everyone can learn from and apply these lessons to their own lives where fear prevents us from moving forward. Those who have built grit into their normal lives can face difficult setbacks in life and choose to continue propelling forward. In hard times, it's perseverance that gets you through. If you see quitting as an option, then more often than not, that's what you'll choose.

Just like how men and women rescue swimmers must deal with the chaos and unpredictability of harrowing rescues, we all have unique traumatic events at times in our lives. Things can be uncertain and there might even be chaos, but what we do in those adverse times predicts our mindset and ability to be resilient and come back stronger from life's setbacks and learn from them. It's not about if we fail or succeed, it's about if we learn from the experiences to create a healthier approach to life in the future.

Foundation Crossword - Answers



Flying High with HSC-6: A First-Hand Account of RIMPAC 2024

By LT Gabrielle Bonowski, USN and LT Chuck Dimer, USN

Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron Six (HSC-6) Indians recently had the privilege of participating in a truly unforgettable experience during the 2024 Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) in Oahu, Hawaii. According to Vice Admiral John Wade, Commander, U.S. 3rd Fleet and RIMPAC 2024 Combined Task Force (CTF) Commander, the purpose of RIMPAC 2024 was to, "Build relationships, to enhance interoperability and proficiency and, ultimately, contribute to the peace and stability in the vitally-important Indo-Pacific region." HSC-6 provided an overland logistics support mission, MEDEVAC support, and transportation flights for distinguished visitors, including high-ranking officials like the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON), and other top allied leaders. Flying these esteemed guests highlighted the unity, cooperation, and dedication driving the success of RIMPAC.

While navigating the skies above Hawaii, we had the unique opportunity to work with various allied ships from 29 partner nations participating in RIMPAC. It was a thrilling experience to showcase our expertise in aerial and shipboard operations while providing our distinguished guests with a bird's eye view of the ongoing naval exercise below. One of the many guests we flew was the first female CNO, Admiral Lisa Franchetti. We had the opportunity to fly her and a large media team to a New Zealand ship, where she interviewed with 60 Minutes Australia, followed by a ship from the Republic of Korea.

Hopping between foreign ships, we leaned heavily on the skill of allied air controllers, plane captains, and deck handlers for safe execution. Standardization of voice reports and hand signals helped reinforce trust in coalition units.

Vice Admiral John Wade also flew with HSC-6 between participating ships to speak to the crews and oversee the exercise from a deck-plate level. Captains and Admirals from various allied nations entrusted us with their transportation from shore-to-sea at a moment's notice. These high ranking officials symbolized the strong partnerships between nations and emphasized the value of RIMPAC as a platform for building trust, fostering interoperability, and strengthening relationships among maritime forces.

In addition to flying distinguished visitors, the squadron integrated with the RIMPAC Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) facilitating communication, coordination, and cooperation between participating units and nations. The integration with the CAOC ultimately enhanced our ability to work effectively by serving as the central hub for planning and executing air operations. The collaboration and camaraderie among the nations involved was on full display. The ability to seamlessly coordinate flights and showcase the operational capabilities of the participating countries underscored the shared commitment to upholding maritime security and stability in the Indo-Pacific Region.

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HSM-72 Welcomes New Commanding Officer

By LT George "Duckface" King, USN

The "Proud Warriors" of HSM-72 changed commanders during the squadron's Change of Command Ceremony on November 22, 2024 at sea aboard USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75).

CDR Jeffrey "Swinger" Storer, a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was relieved by CDR Gregory "Honcho" Zilai, a native of Brielle, New Jersey. CDR Storer graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 2005 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Ocean Engineering. Following commissioning, he earned his Master's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Pittsburgh. He completed flight training and was designated a Naval Aviator in Milton, Florida in 2009.

The ceremony was held as a rite of passage to signify a change of commanders. While in command, Storer led HSM-72 through multiple at sea and ashore exercises in preparation for the Carrier Strike Group Eight deployment to the U.S. Fifth and Sixth Fleet Areas of Responsibility, including Helicopter Advanced Readiness Program (HARP), Tailored Ships Training Availability (TSTA), Surface Warfare Assessment Training Team (SWATT), Air Wing Fallon, and Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX). His efforts ensured the Proud Warriors met readiness standards and qualifications for deployment certification. Additionally, he led the squadron through multiple NATO exercises in the first two months of deployment.

"Leading 'The Tribe' and our incredible Sailors at sea in preparation for going into harm's way was the ultimate highlight of my career," Storer said. "I could not be more proud of everything this team has accomplished, and there is no doubt in my mind they are a highly capable combat unit ready to deter and defeat any adversary action. I wish them well throughout the remainder of deployment."

CDR Zilai graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 2007 with a Bachelor of Science in Systems Engineering. He completed his flight training in Milton, Florida, and earned his Wings of Gold in March of 2009. CDR Zilai thanked CDR Storer for his leadership and guidance as he assumed command of HSM-72.

"I could not have asked for a better mentor and friend than Skipper "Swinger." The successes that we will have are grounded in the foundation that he helped us build, and I am incredibly grateful for everything he has done for all Proud Warriors, myself included." CDR Zilai further discussed the rich legacy of the HSM Community, as he prepares to take the helm of HSM-72. "Taking command of a squadron at sea is incredibly humbling; in particular at this time in our history. For over 40 years, Proud Warriors have answered their nation's call to provide safety and security to our allies and partners around the world. Any time, any place, any conflict…WE RIDE!"

The "Proud Warriors" of HSM-72 held a change of command ceremony while at sea aboard USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), November 22, 2024. CDR Jeffrey Storer was relieved by CDR Gregory Zilai. **U.S. Navy photo.**

HSM-72 is known for their exemplary performance in supporting Atlantic Fleet aircraft carriers and air capable ships and has been recognized with various awards and citations. Some of these awards and citations include: 14-time winner of the Navy Battle "E" Award, 13-time winner of the Chief of Naval Operations Safety Award, 13-time winner of the U.S. Fleet Forces Golden Anchor for Retention Excellence Award, 11-time winner of the Captain Arnold Jay Isbell Trophy, nine-time winner of the Commander, Helicopter Maritime Strike Wing Atlantic TALON Award, seven-time winner of the CNAF Squadron Blue "M" Award, four-time winner of the CNAL Arleigh Burke Fleet Trophy, and two-time winner of the Commander, Helicopter Maritime Strike Wing Atlantic Pettibone Award.

Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 8 Conducts Change of Command in San Diego

By LT Matthew "Heimi" Villedieu, USN

The "World Famous Eightballers" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron Eight (HSC-8) conducted a change of command ceremony on November 21, 2024 on board Naval Air Station North Island.

CDR Ronnie "BT" Cituk, from Niskayuna, New York, stood relieved as CDR Ian "Turd Ferguson" Gill, from Norwalk, Connecticut, took the reins of the prestigious squadron to be the 60th Commanding Officer of the Eightballers. CAPT Ross "JR" Drenning, Commander Carrier Air Wing 11 (CVW-11) presided over the transfer of command.

CDR Ronnie "BT" Cituk stands relieved. CAPT Ross "JR" Drenning, Commander, Carrier Air Wing 11 (CVW-11) presided over the transfer of command.

CDR Cituk led the "Eightballers" as their Commanding Officer from August 2023 to November 2024. The Eightballers deployed from January through October 2024 and were an essential component of the U.S. Navy's commitment to critical U.S. partners and allies in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and U.S. Central Command areas of responsibility. One component of Carrier Air Wing ELEVEN (CVW-11), the Eightballers flew daily logistics and search and rescue missions in support of Carrier Strike Group NINE (CSG-9) group sail, and COMTUEX certifications in 2023 as well as the arduous nine month 2024 deployment. Commander Cituk valiantly led the "World Famous Eightballers" in the safe execution of Personnel Recovery, Logistics, and Light Attack throughout this deployment to include integrated open-ocean Personnel Recovery training events with Joint and Allied forces across a wide swath of the Western Pacific Ocean, two Strait of Hormuz transits, and the life-saving rescue of one a man overboard in the South China Sea and two Iranian mariners after their vessel sank in the Gulf of Oman.

CDR Gill assumed command of HSC-8 after serving as the Executive Officer since August 2023. Commander Gill earned his commission in May 2008 from the United States Naval Academy. He holds a Master of Systems Analysis via correspondence from the United States Naval Postgraduate School, and graduated from the United States Naval War College with distinction in 2023 with a Master of Arts in Defense and Strategic Studies. Commander Gill's previous assignments include HSC-9, HSC-3, CVW-2, and HSC-4 with numerous deployments aboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), and USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71).

HSC-8 executes Personnel Recovery, Logistics, Maritime Interdiction, and Light Attack in support of CVW-11 and CSG-9.

CDR Cituk's last flight as CO of HSC-8.

Change of Command

USS Makin Island (LHD 8)

CAPT Jose Arana, USN
relieved
CAPT Andria Slough, USN
October 17, 2024

HSC-8
Eightballers

CDR Ian Gill, USN
relieved
CDR Ronnie Cituk, USN
November 21, 2024

HT-18
Vigilant Eagles

LtCol Daniel Bowring, USMC
relieved
CDR David Kiser, USN
October 10, 2024

HSM-72
Proud Warriors

CDR Gregory Zilai, USN
relieved
CDR Jeffrey Storer, USN
November 22, 2024

Congratulations ADM Holsey!

ADM Alvin Holsey, USN relieved GEN Laura J. Richardson, USA, as Commander, U.S. Southern Command on November 7, 2024.

Writing the Great American Novel

By CAPT George Galdorisi, USN (Ret.)

Is there anyone reading this who wants to write "The Great American Novel?" Great. Kudos. Congratulations. Good luck. Please skip ahead to the next article because I likely won't be of much help. I write thrillers: novels where ordnance are fired, things blow up, there are heroes and villains, and the good guys typically win (but not without a life-changing struggle).

When I write thrillers, I'm not trying to change anyone's life, way of thinking, save the world, or whatever other motivation some who write have. I am just trying to entertain. As the motto of the company, Braveship, that published my last two novels, says, "If we're not keeping you up at night, we're not doing our job." That's what I try to do.

I say all this only partially tongue-in-cheek. When someone asks me about writing, it typically isn't about writing an article, or narrative non-fiction, or a memoir, or anything else. The conversation usually starts, "I have a great idea for a novel."

This is the fourth installment of our Rotor Review writing series. Just to recap, those first three articles represented a bit of a building-block approach designed to help NHA members accelerate their writing journey to put their thoughts on paper and get them out into the world.

The first piece talked about writing in general: The small "w" - writing at work, as well as the big "W" - writing for a mainstream audience.

The next one offered some tactics, techniques, and procedures for crafting an article for a professional magazine like Rotor Review.

The third one moved into non-fiction and described the rich and diverse market for non-fiction books, both narrative non-fiction and prescriptive non-fiction.

This article will talk about novels, but mainly thrillers, as that is what I know about. That is not to say that you can't or shouldn't write a romance novel, or a sci-fi book, or a young adult story, or anything else. All of those are worthy undertakings.

Full disclosure: I write thrillers because I am lazy. Sure, I could give any of those other genres a shot, but if I did, I would not be able to leverage my 30 years on active duty and write things I know about. Said another way, if you paid money and hired a writing coach, the first thing he or she would tell you is, "Write what you know."

Here is how it worked for me, and can work for you as well. My 2017 novel, The Coronado Conspiracy, was set aboard USS Coronado (once the Third Fleet flagship) and involved drug lords and military operations to destroy their cartels. During my time in uniformm, I commanded USS Cleveland (which is the same class ship, an LPD, as USS Coronado) and did counter-drug operations a number of times. I wrote what I knew.

My 2018 novel, "For Duty and Honor," was set aboard an aircraft carrier operating in the Arabian Gulf during tensions with Iran. I served as a Carrier Strike Group Chief of Staff for five years including pumps to the Gulf aboard USS Carl Vinson and USS Abraham Lincoln. During both deployments, I saw the pressure our admiral was under, especially when we dropped ordnance on nasty people. Again, I wrote what I knew. And so have many others who have worn flight suits just like you and me!

Former squadron-mate, Kevin McDonald, wrote a great novel, "A Nation Interrupted." It is getting terrific reviews and selling well. However, this was not his first book-length writing effort. He previously published a terrific non-fiction book, "Life Inside the Dead Man's Curve," which is a book chronicling his exploits flying civilian medical evacuation helicopters. What I think is important, and not to oversell doing some non-fiction work first, is the fact that Kevin would tell you that in the process of producing "Life Inside the Dead Man's Curve" he learned many of the tactics, techniques and procedures that helped make his novel such a good product.

Marc Liebman is another helo bubba who has a great career writing novels. His first novel, "Big Mother 40," should tell you a lot about what he flew. Mark is one of the most industrious writers I know and keeps turning out good books

year after year. He is a good example to follow if you want to get your stuff read, as in pre-COVID days he was out there doing several book signings a month.

Then there is Anne Wilson who leveraged her experience as an HC aviator and who has written two wonderful novels that will put you there, Hover and Clear to Lift. Another HC aviator, Larry Carello, has also written great thrillers about flying, Rotorboys and Verbal Orders. And there are any number of former aviators and others who have written what they know.

So why would you want to torture yourself to write 80,000 to 100,00 words and then edit, reedit and then edit what you wrote many more times? For the financial riches? For fame and glory? For a Hollywood deal? Not likely. Here is the reason my good friend, mentor, and writing partner, former Navy SEAL, Dick Couch, put it in an article, "So You Want to be a Writer:"

For me, I gotta write, and it's the adventure of it that's hooked me. As the writer, I can do it all. I get to be the National Security Advisor who recommends the action to the President who must commit the forces. I'm the senior officer who sends his men into action and who feels the pain if they don't make it back. I'm the enemy and the defender; logistician and staff planner. But most of all, I'm a young man again, that fresh lieutenant who must lead his men into battle.

Having said that, I would be doing you all a disservice if I didn't tell you that the market is saturated with novels (both in print and self-published) so there is a great deal of competition. And if you are just starting out and want to sell your novel to a publisher, that is a huge investment of time and energy put into something that might not see the light of day. Even if you do have some works of fiction under your belt and you can sell your novel to a publisher with just a treatment, that is not a trivial task. A thriller treatment I recently sent to my agent was 22,000 words.

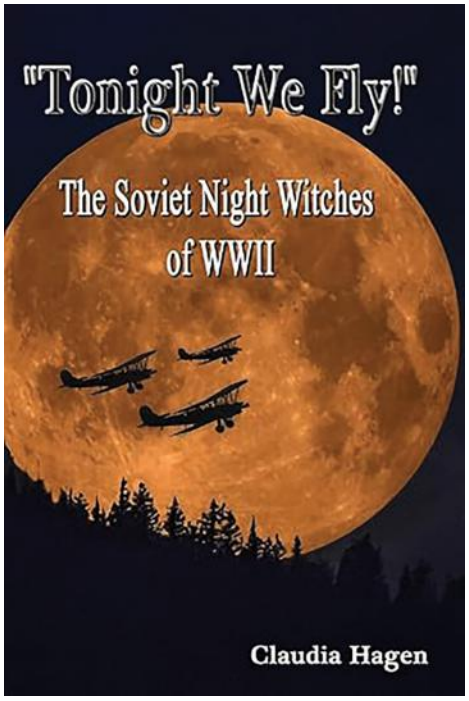
If you want to write novels, the old saw about "One percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration," likely holds true for most of us. Think of a great idea for a novel as the acorn you drop on the ground and kick dirt over. You've got to pour a lot of water on it before it becomes a tree. Here is what an article in the New York Times said about Tom Clancy:

Mr. Clancy said none of his success came easily, and he would remind aspiring writers of that when he spoke to them. "I tell them you learn to write the same way you learn to play golf," he once said. "You do it, and keep doing it until you get it right. A lot of people think something mystical happens to you, that maybe the muse kisses you on the ear. But writing isn't divinely inspired - it's hard work."

This article can only be so long, so I will share some more specific advice about writing novels in my article in the next issue. However, if you would like to look ahead, here is a link to my website: https://www.georgegaldorisi.com/. If you go to the pull-down menu at the top under Services and then open Seminars and Courses and then go to Get Published Now and then go to the fourth slide deck, The Great American Novel, you will see all the slides in the novel writing course I have given multiple times. If you have questions on any of this, please feel free to contact me via my website or the NHA Office. I had a lot of help along the way in my writing efforts, and shame on me if I don't pay it forward.

"Tonight We Fly" — The Soviet Night Witches of WWII by Claudia Hagen

Reviewed by LCDR Chip Lancaster, USN (Ret.)



It is the 1930s Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. Women have had equal rights since the revolution and are active members of the military, serving on the front lines as anti-aircraft gunners, snipers, and bomber and fighter pilots. "Tonight We Fly" is the story of an all-women's bomber squadron during World War II. Author Claudia Hagen has given us a picture of this era and the formation of these all women combat groups. I picked this book because of the unique aspect of these air groups being the first women to fly in combat in history. It has always fascinated me how the group was formed and operated. I also picked the book because it gives unique insight into the mindset and war fighting capabilities of both the Russian and Ukrainian people. During this era, Ukraine was a state of the Soviet Union and part of Russia from which many of the women in these squadrons came.

Hagen begins with a detailed overview of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Aviation was new, and young people were encouraged to get involved through aviation schools and clubs, especially women. Additionally, she outlines the nature of the war where, in the Soviet Union, WWII is known as "The Great Patriotic War," with ample reason to name it as such. The Russians were fighting on a single front in the war, defending their homeland which had been invaded by millions of German troops. They were not fighting a war on many fronts as the United States, the United Kingdom, and other European countries were. While the United States and the Soviet Union were comparable in population for their relative sizes, the U.S. had just over a million killed and wounded in the European theater with no civilian casualties while the Soviet Union had over 11 million killed or wounded with 18 million civilian casualties. Russia calling it "The Great Patriotic War" puts that title into perspective. Hagen also gives insight into the nature of aviation, especially for women, noting the many counterparts of famous women in the western world such as Amelia Earhart. The Soviet Union had its own unique female aviation pioneers with women flying events every bit as long, risky, and harrowing as anything flown in the western world. Russian women such as Valentina Grizodubova, Polina Osipenko, Marina Raskova, and many others are detailed in the book.

In June 1941, the Soviet Union was invaded along a 900 mile front. The call went out for people to join the armed services including women. Marina Raskova was charged with formulating the women's squadron regiments to include a fighter regiment, a bomber regiment, and a night bomber regiment. While men participated in ground operations for the fighter and bomber squadrons, no men participated with the night bombers. By the end of 1941, almost one-third of Soviet pilots were women, most in their late teens to early twenties. Haggen's book focuses on the women's 588th Night Bomber Squadron. The women were trained as quickly as possible and then sent to frontline areas where they flew from unprepared fields and roads with surplus WWI Polikarpov Po-2 under-powered wood and fabric biplanes.

The conditions under which the squadrons conducted combat flight operations were extremely arduous. These squadrons often worked in freezing snow, mud, and high temperatures without hangars. All their flight operations were conducted at night, unaided, flying aircraft equipped with little instrumentation other than airspeed, altimeter, tachometer, engine oil pressure, and a compass. All flight operations, except day reconnaissance, were conducted after sunset in all weather conditions including rain, snow, fog, and clouds with each aircraft crewed by a pilot and a navigator. The aircraft themselves were unarmored and unarmed, except in the later stages of the war when they had one fixed rearward firing machine gun operated by the navigator. These were open cockpit biplanes with nothing to protect the crew except a small windscreen. With limited heat available they always flew in the winter bundled up to the point where one could barely hold the stick and operate the controls. Their mission was to bomb German facilities continuously throughout the night stopping only at first light when the aircraft could be repaired, refueled, and rearmed. Continuous operation meant that each crew might fly 6 to 8 missions during a single evening. The missions were short, allowing just enough turn-around time to refuel and put more bombs on the small biplanes which could only carry a light load for each mission. Also emphasized was the strenuous conditions under which the ground crews operated. Everything they did was in darkness unless there was a full moon. There were no lights. During freezing conditions, the metal on the bombs and the aircraft would cause the skin to stick to the surface then rip off when pulled away making loading bombs, refueling, and servicing extremely hazardous.

The missions were flown using dead reckoning navigation in complete darkness with only a paper map and a flashlight for the navigator. A typical bombing run would only make one pass at the target by cutting off the engine then diving silently to the bomb release point, releasing the bomb, and pulling out while restarting the engine. These were probably the first stealth aircraft missions. To give a sense of what the Germans were up against, a quote from a Luftwaffe ace at the time said, "We simply could not grasp that the Soviet airmen that caused us the greatest trouble were in fact women, these women feared nothing, they came night after night in their very slow biplanes and for some periods they wouldn't give us any sleep at all."

Hagen's book is a clear and concise recounting of these female night combat squadrons. It is theorized they were given the name "Night Witches" from the swishing sound that the wind made through the biplane's wires and struts as they silently dove to release bombs. It is sad to note that after the war much the same happened to them as with the WASP pilots in the United States. When Stalin ordered them disbanded, they kept operating in secret until well after his death. Of note was the comment of a highly decorated Soviet fighter pilot after the war, stating, "It is hardly possible to overestimate the contribution made by Soviet women to our victory over Nazism. They had a zest for life, they wanted to study, to raise children, and to work hard, but when the need arose, they faced danger and died without faltering. They consciously sacrificed their young lives in the great cause on board fighters and bombers, they fought the enemy every bit as well as men did. These Soviet young girls amply demonstrated their iron will, steady hand, and accurate eye."

Reading "Tonight We Fly" gave me new insight into the psyche, willpower, and determination of Ukrainians fighting for their country today. I recommend that our military leaders read accounts like this to gain a better understanding of fighters fighting on their own soil to save their country. I strongly recommend this book, giving it five stars and two thumbs up. You can order it on Amazon, any online publishing house, and you can also find it in the NHA Library.

Off Duty - Movie Review

Planes: Fire and Rescue

Reviewed by LCDR Chip Lancaster, USN (Ret.)

This is a New Year mini-review of an aviation movie that's fun for the whole family, even the big pilots among you. Dusty Crophopper, from the original Planes movie, is now an air race champion who must bow out before he bursts his gearbox and crashes. His fall from stardom results in tragedy for his airport of Propwash Junction. He's off to the wilderness to find employment as a firefighter to save the airport. Will Dusty ever get fixed, and will he survive the raging forest fires and danger he confronts? The animation as well as the characterization of equipment, vehicles, and aircraft are superb, making this Disney movie special. The characters are voiced by over fifty actors and the boss aircraft is a helicopter. As if that was not enough, the movie has plenty of exciting action and tense moments as well as life lessons and a beautiful soundtrack. The aerial action is realistic with authentic radio calls. I've seen this movie several times and see something new every time, like forklifts doing a line dance. Although Planes: Fire and Rescue received mixed reviews, it is well worth the price of admission, receiving two flying thumbs up from this reviewer. Get it, get the popcorn, and watch it with your kids, you won't be disappointed.

Congratulations to the next generation of Naval Aviation warfighters who received their Wings of Gold at NAS Whiting Field. These aviators will move to the Fleet to learn their designated platforms.

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
November 22, 2024

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
November 8, 2024

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
October 25, 2024

Congratulations to the New Naval Aviators
October 11, 2024

Congratulations to the New HSC-3 Aircrew Graduates
November 22, 2024

Congratulations to the New HSM-40 Aircrew Graduates
November 8, 2024

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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 Robert Eugene Jones, USN (Ret.)

Bob Jones was born April 6, 1939 in Salem, Kentucky. Moving to Indiana, he graduated from Evansville Central High School in 1957. During the summers of his high school years, he traveled the state of Indiana as a door-to-door salesman and traveled the entire country as a daredevil driver with The Tommy and Larry Holden Daredevil Revue. Bob joined the U.S. Navy in 1957. Qualifying for an NROTC scholarship from the Fleet, he was released to the inactive reserves in 1958 and sent to Ohio State University where he graduated in 1962, and married his childhood sweetheart, Barbara Ann Harris. After graduation, he was commissioned as an Ensign. Then after flight training in Pensacola, he was designated a Naval Aviator and helicopter pilot in 1964. During his 26 years in the Navy, Bob and Barb lived on both coasts, and in Atsugi, Japan. Bob also spent a year in Iran, as Commander of a Technical Assistance Field Team, training Iranians to maintain and fly Sikorsky H-3 helicopters.

During Vietnam, he served as Officer-in Charge of the "Big Mothers," flying Combat Search and Rescue in the Tonkin Gulf. He commanded the first fully-integrated operational Helicopter Mine Countermeasures squadron (HM-14) flying RH-53Ds and eventually served as Commanding Officer, NAS Whiting Field, Milton, Florida. He retired in 1987, having flown six different types of helicopters across the entire spectrum of naval rotary-wing aviation. After retirement, Bob went to work for UNC Aviation Services, a small defense contracting company specializing in aviation maintenance and training, primarily for the services' air training commands. As the company grew, to more than 4,000 employees, Bob was promoted to Vice President of Operations and oversaw programs ranging from Del Rio, Texas to Lakehurst, NJ, including maintenance of all jet and helicopter training aircraft in the Naval Air Training Command. Upon his second retirement in 1999, Bob immediately qualified as a tour guide at the National Museum of Naval Aviation where he led guided tours for more than 20 years. He also volunteered as an adult reading tutor with Learn to Read of Northwest Florida, served as a Guardian ad Litem and was a tour guide for the Pensacola Historical Society's annual Halloween fund-raiser. He was an elder in the First Presbyterian Church of Pensacola and devoted many volunteer hours in support of our local community. He loved fishing the local waters and was a member of the Hawg Hunters Bass Club and the Speckled Trout Club. After the death of his beloved wife, Barbara, after 56 years of marriage, Bob met and married the second love of his life, Barbara Rushing. They enjoyed their life together, living between Azalea Trace in Pensacola in winter and the mountains of North Carolina in the summers.

Bob was predeceased by his wife, Barbara Harris Jones, his daughters, Leta Sue Witcher and Angela Marie Jones, and his son, Mitchell Robert Jones. He is survived by his grandson, Eric Mitchell Jones, granddaughter, Nicole Gene Witcher, great granddaughter, Arabella Marie Turner, and his wife, Barbara Rushing Jones.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a memorial donation to First Presbyterian Church of Pensacola, 33 E Gregory St, Pensacola, Florida, 32502. A graveside service was held on November 22, 2024 at Bayview Memorial Park.

Fair Winds and Following Seas CAPT Jones!

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