



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
CARRIER AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING SQUADRON  
ONE HUNDRED TWENTY THREE  
FPO NEW YORK 09501

**DECLASSIFIED**

VAW123/PAO/das  
05000  
Ser: 03  
29 March 1969

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~--Declassified upon removal of enclosure (1)

From: Commanding Officer, Carrier Airborne Early Warning  
Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY THREE

To: Director of Naval History (OP 09B9)

Subj: Command History; forwarding of

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12A

Encl: (1) VAW-123 Command History

1. In accordance with reference (a) enclosure (1) is submitted.

  
K. G. SMITH

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

GROUP - 4  
Downgraded at 3 year intervals.  
Declassified after 12 years.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

**DECLASSIFIED**

CARRIER AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING SQUADRON

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY THREE

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

DATE	EVENT
1 April 1967	VAW-123, Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY THREE established at Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia in SP-1. Commander Lucio W. Hill assumed command.
8 April 1967	LCDR J.D. Larison and LTJG J.M. Prendergast flew aircraft 702 coast-to-coast from NAS North Island to NAS Norfolk non-stop in six hours and thirty minutes.
11 April 1967	Embarked aboard USS FORRESTAL (CVA-59) with Attack Carrier Air Wing SEVENTEEN (CVW-17) for refresher training in the Caribbean.
18 April 1967	Participated in Operation Clove Hitch III.
26 May 1967	Returned to Norfolk, Virginia.
6 June 1967	Departed for an Operational Readiness Inspection in the Caribbean and subsequent deployment to Southeast Asia.
20 June 1967	USS FORRESTAL crossed the Equator. 128 Officers and men of VAW-123 were initiated into the Royal Domain of Neptunis Rex.

---

23 June 1967 Entered the port of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

26 June 1967 Departed Rio de Janeiro.

3 July 1967 Completed passage around the Cape of Good Hope.

18 July 1967 Arrived in Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines.

21 July 1967 Departed Subic Bay for Yankee Station.

23 July 1967 Arrived on Yankee Station.

29 July 1967 USS FORRESTAL fire. No VAW-123 casualties. Minor aircraft damage.

30 July 1967 Arrived in Subic Bay for repairs to USS FORRESTAL.

12 August 1967 Departed Subic Bay for CONUS.

31 August 1967 Crossed the Equator and three VAW-123 personnel were initiated into the Royal Domain of Neptunus Rex.

12 September 1967 Arrived Mayport, Florida. Operational stop.

14 September 1967 Arrived Norfolk, Virginia.

10 December 1967 Participated in Federal Echo 12-4 with 33rd Norad.

1968

23 February 1968 Deployed to NAAF Fallon, Nevada for Air Wing SEVENTEEN Weapons Training.

2 March 1968 Returned to Naval Air Station Norfolk, Virginia.

16 April 1968 Change of Command. Commander K.G. Smith relieved  
Commander L. W. Hill.

23 April 1968 Embarked aboard USS FORRESTAL for refresher training  
in the Caribbean.

11 May 1968 Entered port of Montego Bay, Jamaica.

17 May 1968 Departed Montego Bay.

23 May 1968 Returned to Norfolk, Virginia.

11 June 1968 Embarked aboard USS FORRESTAL for an Operational  
Readiness Inspection off Jacksonville, Florida.

27 June 1968 Returned to NAS Norfolk, Virginia.

22 July 1968 Departed Norfolk in USS FORRESTAL on extended deployment.

27 July 1968 Passed through the Straits of Gibraltar. Inchopt to  
Sixth Fleet.

6-8 August 1968 Anchorage at Porte Conte, Sardinia.

10 August 1968 Entered port of Marseille, France.

16 August 1968 Departed Marseille.

17-18 August 1968 Conducted modified Combat Readiness Exercise (CRAE).  
Grade - - 95.57, highest in the air wing.

24-26 August 1968 Training anchorage at Souda Bay, Crete.

27 August 1968 Entered port of Athens, Greece.

---

2 September 1968 Departed Athens.

15-16 September 1968 Anchorage at St. Paul's Bay, Malta.

17 September 1968 Entered port of Valetta, Malta.

24 September 1968 Departed Valetta.

29 September 1968 Air battle problem with USS INDEPENDENCE.

1-3 October 1968 Anchorage at Argostoli Bay, Greece.

4-5 October 1968 Participated in Sixth Fleet Escort Evaluation Program (SEEP).

6-8 October 1968 Anchorage at Argostoli Bay, Greece.

9 October 1968 Entered port of Taranto, Italy.

13 October 1968 Departed Taranto.

16 October 1968 Exercise Quickdraw 10-68 with Italian Navy.

16 October 1968 E-2A 733 lost at sea after night CCA bolter. LCDR James Leo Delaney (CICO), LCDR Paul Martin Wright (Pilot), and LTjg Howard Booth Rutledge (Co-pilot) were lost. LTjg Frank Joseph Frederick (ACO) and AT1 David Eugene Carpenter (RO) were recovered.

5 November 1968 Entered port of Thessaloniki, Greece.

11 November 1968 Departed Thessaloniki.

19-23 November 1968 Participated in Exercise National Week I.

---

25 November 1968 Entered port of Palma, Majorca.  
2 December 1968 Departed Palma.  
7 December 1968 Entered port of Genoa, Italy.  
17 December 1968 Departed Genoa.  
13 December 1968 Entered port of Golfe Juan, (Cannes) France.

1969

3 January 1969 Departed Golfe Juan.  
5-10 January 1969 Participated in an Amphibious exercise (PHIBLEX 8-69)  
off the coast of Sardinia.  
13 January 1969 Entered port of Valetta, Malta.  
20 January 1969 Departed Valetta.  
22 January 1969 Anchorage at Taranto, Italy.  
25 January 1969 Departed Taranto.  
27 January 1969 Participated in exercise Quickdraw 2-69 with Italian  
Navy.  
28 January 1968 Entered port of Naples, Italy.  
3 February 1969 Departed Naples.  
8 February 1969 Anchorage at Samsun Bay, Turkey.  
10 February 1969 Entered port of Istanbul, Turkey.

---

17 February 1969      Departed Istanbul.

22 February 1969      Entered port of Athens, Greece.

# Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY THREE

## Basic Narrative

### I. Development of Airborne Early Warning Squadrons;

The first east coast airborne early warning squadron, VAW-2 was established on 6 July 1948 at Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia. To perform its AEW tasks, VAW-2 was given TBM-3F's and TBM-3W's. VAW-2 moved from Norfolk to Quonset Point, Rhode Island and changed its name to Composite Squadron TWELVE (VC-12) on 1 September 1948. By June, 1950 AD-3W's had replaced the obsolete TBM's. The succession of AEW aircraft continued through the 1950's as AD-4W's replaced the 3W's and 5W's replaced the 4W's.

In July 1956 VC-12 underwent another title change, this time to Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron TWELVE or VAW-12. The widely heralded arrival of the WF-2 (later redesignated E-1) "Tracer" occurred on 20 January 1960. The last AD detachment from VAW-12 to embark on an attack carrier boarded USS FORRESTAL (CVA-59) on 25 January 1960. In August 1961, all of the AD's were transferred to VAW-33 which left VAW-12 free to concentrate on improved performance and tactics with the E-1B.

VAW-12 returned to Norfolk on 9 September 1962 and continued to send E-1B detachments on Atlantic Fleet aircraft carriers,

### II. Birth of VAW-123

When VAW-12 DETACHMENT 59 returned to Norfolk Virginia in late 1965, USS FORRESTAL entered the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for ten months of extensive overhaul and modernization prior to her next deployment scheduled for WESTPAC and the Vietnam conflict. While on the yard, USS FORRESTAL received the Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS) and was equipped to support

two of the Navy's newest and most sophisticated aircraft, the A6A and the E-2A.

During this period of overhaul, DETACHMENT 59 was deactivated and selected Pilots, Naval Flight Officers, and maintenance support personnel from VAW-12 were ordered to NAS NORTH ISLAND to begin transition from the E-1B to the E-2A "Hawkeye" which was already operational on the West Coast. DETACHMENT "North Island" was under the watchful leadership of Lieutenant Commander Charles J. BERTHE, Jr. who would later join VAW-123 as Executive Officer.

Upon returning from the West Coast in August 1966, DETACHMENT "North Island" was reorganized and divided, and became the nucleus for the re-activated DETACHMENT 59 and the newly formed DETACHMENT 66. These two detachments became the first East Coast units to deploy with the E-2A Hawkeye. VAW-12 DETACHMENT 59, with Commander Lucio W. HILL as Officer-in-Charge, deployed with USS FORRESTAL and Air Wing SEVENTEEN in mid January 1967 for a one month refresher training cruise off Cuba and Puerto Rico. DETACHMENT 59 returned to NAS Norfolk in late February 1967 to prepare for the most significant change in Airborne Early Warning since 1948.

The ceremony held on 1 April 1967 at 1000Q in SP-1, NAS Norfolk, Virginia gave birth to VAW-123 but marked an end to an organization which had been the largest Naval squadron on the East coast. VAW-12 was redesignated and became Carrier Airborne Early Warning Wing TWELVE under the command of Captain J. A. Parisenu. At the same time VAW-123 was established under the command of CDR L. W. HILL. VAW-123, formerly DETACHMENT 59 of the old organization, then became the first E-2A squadron on either East or West coast to be established. It was felt that the reorganization

and establishment of the E-2A squadrons would improve the efficiency, give a greater reliability in performance, and reduce the constant interdepartment shift of manpower that the old organization had experienced.

### III. History of VAW-123

On 11 April 1967 shortly after its establishment, VAW-123 found itself aboard USS FORRESTAL (CVA-59) enroute to the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range for participation in OPERATION CLOVEHITCH. Before leaving however, VAW-123 began a series of firsts that was to continue throughout its first year as a squadron. On 8 April 1967 LCDR J. D. Larison and LTJG J. M. Prendergast flew 702, one of VAW-123's aircraft, non-stop, coast-to-coast, from NAS NORTH ISLAND, California to NAS NORFOLK, Virginia in six hours and 30 minutes. The flight was a first for a fleet E-2A Hawkeye although the nonstop flight had been made before under experimental conditions.

On 6 June 1967, VAW-123 found itself again on USS FORRESTAL (CVA-59) enroute to the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range but this time for an Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) and deployment to WestPac. After the ORI VAW-123 entered the royal domain of Neptunus Rex and became the first East coast E-2A squadron to be initiated into the Royal Order of Shellbacks.

USS FORRESTAL continued south to the port of Rio De Janerio, Brazil, arriving on 23 June 1967 for a good-will visit and a well deserved rest period prior to travelling to the South China Sea. From messages received on the 26th of June 1967, after departure from Rio, it seems that the visit of VAW-123 and the USS FORRESTAL had been a resounding success. One week later the USS FORRESTAL rounded the Cape of Good Hope and continued North East towards Cubi Point in the Phillipines. During this crossing, all squadrons stepped up training lectures to cover the many aspects of the Viet Nam conflict. The increase in tempo could be seen throughout the ship

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

and especially in the Air Wing as the sobering thoughts of war drew nearer. VAW-123 flight crews went through the latest information on "Night Hawk" Operations which was a joint effort between the E-2 and the Army in an effort to stop the truck convoys moving into South Viet-Nam at night. The E-2 crews were seen briefing the helicopter rescue teams in connection with Search and Rescue missions for downed pilots. Attack squadrons were given the latest information from VAW-123 in what help they could expect in navigation to their targets and vectors around "AAA of SAM" sights. Last minute briefs were given to the fighter squadrons to coordinate the MIG killing capabilities of the E-2A and F-4 team. An advanced Liaison Officer, LCDR B. L. FISH, was sent to the "PIRAZ" ship in the Gulf of Tonkin. The Positive Identification Radar Advisory Zone or "PIRAZ" ship was to work directly with the E-2 in checking for enemy aircraft and P.T. boats. Numerous other missions were covered during this period until USS FORRESTAL reached Subic Bay in the Philippines on the 18th of July 1967. A five day layover replenished the ship and on the 23rd of July 1967, VAW-123 on board the USS FORRESTAL became the first East Coast E-2A Squadron to enter the Viet-Nam war zone. The next five days were filled with early pre-dawn briefs for strikes against targets in North Viet-Nam in the "Hour Glass" area; Vinh, Thanh Ho and adjacent territory. Debriefings and reconnaissance photographs showed the highly accurate and successful bombing capabilities of Air Wing 17 under combat conditions. One E-2A was called out on a Search and Rescue mission to the south where two aviators had gone down in an A3 tanker. The E-2 was later directed into Cubi Point after one pilot was rescued.

At 1050 on Saturday 29 July 1967, aircraft 701 was on Number 1 catapult readying for a launch in support of a pre-briefed strike against Hanoi and

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Haiphong, when suddenly a fire broke out on the flight deck. Within minutes it spread to aircraft fully loaded with bombs and rockets. The chain reactions set the entire area aft on the flight deck aflame, and shrapnel could be seen splattering in the water around the ship for hundreds of yards. The E-2 escaped with minor damage because it was taxied forward away from the fire. All personnel of VAW-123 were miraculously safe, although many narrowly escaped death by being in compartments adjacent to ones which were completely destroyed by exploding bombs.

During that day and night VAW-123 personnel were seen everywhere throughout the ship fighting fires, helping the injured, and evacuating the dead. Many men worked twenty or thirty hours straight, and stopped only when they were told to by someone who saw that they were near exhaustion. When resting, the men had to stay on the flight deck or in passageways in the forward part of the ship. Almost every man's sleeping space had been in the aft section of the ship which had been totally destroyed by the flames. The ship limped into Cubi Point on the 30th of July 1968 and received temporary repairs to enable it to make the long voyage back to Norfolk for major overhaul. VAW-123 arrived home at Norfolk aboard the USS FORRESTAL on 14 Sept 1967 where it was shore based while the ship began extensive repair work at Portsmouth Naval ship yard. From then to the end of the year, VAW-123 flew numerous missions around the Norfolk operating areas to maintain its state of readiness and remain in contact with Air Wing 17 squadrons.

1968

During 1968 VAW-123 spent most of its time away from Norfolk. On 23 Feb the squadron deployed to NAS Fallon, Nevada for two weeks weapons deployment with Air Wing 17. It was the first time that the squadron was reunited

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

with Air Wing 17 since USS FORRESTAL's return from WESTPAC. The operations at NAS Fallon provided increased opportunity for training in strike control and airborne intercept control which was necessary to qualify Air Control Officers as Combat Information Center Officers. Because of the great distance from our home base, the squadron used the services of CAEW-11 at NAS, North Island, California.

Upon returning from Fallon, Nevada efforts were directed towards preparing for the Admat inspection which was conducted on 8 and 9 April. On 16 April a change of command ceremony took place where CDR K.G. SMITH became the new commanding officer of VAW-123, relieving CDR L.W. HILL. On 23 April the squadron embarked aboard USS FORRESTAL enroute to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for refresher training and to prepare for an Operational Readiness Inspection. This was the first of two short cruises before deploying to the Mediterranean. The second cruise was in the Jacksonville operating area for 2 weeks in late June. During both of the cruises, emphasis was placed on flight operations and shipboard evolutions. After return from the second cruise, final preparations were made for an extended deployment. On 20 July, 4 E-2A's were flown aboard, along with the rest of CVW-17, and on 22 July USS FORRESTAL sailed for the Mediterranean.

The primary mission of the E-2A in the Sixth Fleet is Airborne Early Warning and Anti-Air Warfare. The squadron has participated in numerous anti-air warfare and surface-to-surface missile exercises. This training contrasts sharply with the WESTPAC mode of operation in which the squadron had been previously been trained which placed emphasis on strike control.

During the periods of vulnerability to Bear/Badger overflights, the E-2A has been an integral part of an alert team which includes F-4's and KA-3 tankers. Areas of concern are those in the eastern Atlantic which

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

are within Bear range from the U.S.S.R. and those areas in the eastern Mediterranean which are within Badger range from the Middle East.

On 17-18 August, a Combat Readiness Assessment Exercise was conducted with observers assigned from USS INDEPENDENCE and embarked squadrons. For its part in the exercise VAW-123 received the highest grade in the Air Wing --95.57-- with an adjective grade of outstanding. All scheduled sorties (11) were flown and all missions assigned were completed successfully.

On 29 September, an air battle problem was conducted between FORRESTAL and INDEPENDENCE. No clear-cut victor was announced, and the general consensus is that the battle was virtually a stand-off with INDEPENDENCE striking the first blow. The first raid on FORRESTAL was largely repelled by CAP and missile escort ships. FORRESTAL's raids on INDEPENDENCE were not so heavily opposed and several successful attacks were made on her towed spar.

During this exercise, the initial search from midnight to dawn, the primary use of VAW-123's E-2A's was search/sanitization of the Sicilian and Southern Italian coasts. Although INDEPENDENCE was not discovered during this phase, large areas were sanitized so that the search effort could be concentrated in another area in the morning where the INDEPENDENCE was discovered.

The longest operating period of the deployment (21 days) began on 15 October after a visit to Taranto, Italy. Exercise Quickdraw 10-68 was held with the Italian Navy on the night of 16 October. This exercise consisted of a high-speed transit of U. S. destroyers through a constricted passage defended by missile launching platforms (destroyers and high-speed torpedo boats). The exercise took place in the Gulf of Taranto and the destroyers were provided air cover from FORRESTAL and surveillance from

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

land-based P2's. The E-2A vectored the P2 over surface contacts for searchlight identification and then controlled FORRESTAL aircraft over the identified enemy for flare drops and simulated attack. After a most successful mission, an unfortunate and very tragic accident occurred when the E-2A flew into the water following a night bolter. LCDR Jim DELANEY (CICO), LCDR Paul WRIGHT (pilot), and LTJG Howard RUTLEDGE (co-pilot) were lost in the accident. LTJG Frank FREDERICK (ACO) was rescued by the destroyer, USS DYESS, and AT-1 David CARPENTER (RO) was picked from the water by a helo from HC-2. Both survivors were uninjured.

CCA's controlled by E2A's were attempted for the first time during this deployment. Two flights were flown, each controlling five A-4's in approaches at two-minute intervals. Controllers endeavored to vector the aircraft to within 10° of centerline at one mile astern the CVA. The results were gratifying, considering the limited experience in this area. With additional practice at this type of operation, the E-2A could prove to be very valuable in an emergency or in a situation where the CVA exercises electronic silence.

An amphibious landing exercise was held during which Task Group 60.2 provided escort services to the amphibious convoy enroute to the AOA and flew close air support missions during and following the landing of the assault force on Southern Sardinia. Throughout this exercise the force was subjected to attack by designated ORANGE forces, Task Group 60.1. The E-2A was utilized in a defensive role against ORANGE forces from both air and surface raider attacks.

Exercise National Week I was conducted from 19 through 23 November. The task assigned to the CVA and Air Wing SEVENTEEN was to search for, locate, and track all Soviet naval vessels and designated U. S. ORANGE

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

surface vessels within a 200 mile radius of the CVA. The E-2A was utilized effectively by controlling and vectoring A-4/F-4 search aircraft over surface contacts. On the final day of the exercise, day and night strikes were E-2A controlled over the ORANGE forces. The results were excellent throughout the exercise, particularly during the final night when one of the ORANGE ships, whose position was unknown, was located and attacked by aircraft under E-2A control, before it could make a successful surface to surface missile attack on the carrier.

During most of these operating periods the Badger alerts described earlier were in effect.

The month of December brought VAW-123 it's first E2A FORRESTAL Centurion when NFO LT. Fred Glaeser trapped aboard for the 100th time in an E2A.

1969

VAW-123 began the new year by flying over 150 hours in support of a six day amphibious exercise. The exercise, which began on 5 January, was similar to previous amphibious operations. The E-2A performed a dual function by controlling strike aircraft into the Amphibious Objective Area (AOA), and by providing AAW sector defense against raid aircraft launched by TG 60.1 from USS INDEPENDENCE. VAW-123 was successful in repelling the raids with assigned F-4's and provided excellent control for strike aircraft supporting the amphibious assault.

After a week in port at Valetta Malta and a two day anchorage in Taranto Italy, VAW-123 supported another Quickdraw exercise with Italian Naval units. This exercise, conducted on the night of 27 January, was designed to test the AAW capabilities of the Italian destroyers. The E 2A

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

searched for, identified (with A-4 scrappers carrying flares), tracked, and controlled strike aircraft onto the destroyers.

On the 28th, USS FORRESTAL arrived in Naples for a short visit. The period from 3 February to 8 February consisted of cyclic flight operations while under the constant threat of Badger overflights. Again, the E-2A assumed alert status during non-flying hours and flew a barrier for optimum Badger detection while airborne.

The Istanbul visit from 10 February to 17 February gave most of the men in VAW-123 their first look at a Middle East country. During flight operations from 18 February to 22 February VAW-123 conducted another practice CCA period with four A-4 aircraft. The object of this period was to land the A-4's safely on deck without using any navigational aids from the carrier. Again, results were gratifying.

The month of February ended at anchor in Athens Greece.

DECLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~