

SQUADRON HISTORY

CARRIER AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING SQUADRON ONE TWO FIVE

VAW-125, known as the *Torch Bearers* or *Tigertails*, was commissioned on October 1, 1968, at Naval Air Station, Norfolk. The squadron's initial supporting command was Carrier Air Wing THREE (CVW-3) deploying aboard USS SARATOGA (CVA 60). While with CVW-3, VAW-125 became the first East Coast squadron to take delivery of the new E-2B Hawkeye.

In the early 1970's, VAW-125 reported to Carrier Air Wing ONE (CVW-1) and made several Mediterranean Sea deployments aboard USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CVA 67), including a deployment with the newest version of the Hawkeye, the E-2C in 1975. In December 1976, Vice Admiral Greed, COMNAVAIRLANT, presented VAW-125 with the COMNAVAIRLANT Battle "E" for readiness, the CINCLANTFLT "Golden Anchor" Award for career retention, and the CNO Safety "S" Award. VAW-125 is believed to be the first Navy unit to win all three awards in the same year. In June 1978, VAW-125 took the E-2C's newest weapons system upgrade, the Advanced Radar Processing System (ARPS), to sea for the first time.

The *Tigertails'* present assignment to Carrier Air Wing SEVENTEEN (CVW-17) began in November 1979, with the squadron making their eighth Mediterranean Sea deployment, this time aboard USS FORRESTAL (CV 59). While deployed in August 1981, VAW-125 participated in Freedom of Navigation Operations in the Central Mediterranean Sea, during which two Libyan MiGs were destroyed after attacking Battle Group aircraft. Upon return from deployment, the squadron participated in two national tasking missions that VAW squadrons would be assigned over the next twenty-plus years, first providing range control services for the second launch of the NASA space shuttle, STS-2, and second providing detection and monitoring services in the first E-2C Counter-Drug tasking, Operation THUNDERBOLT.

In May 1983, CVW-17 paired with USS SARATOGA (CV 60). During work-ups, the squadron operationally evaluated several E-2C weapons systems upgrades in an overland environment, including the APS-138 radar, TRAC-A rotodome, and the ALR-73 passive detection system.

While on routine deployment in October 1985, the *Tigertails* played an instrumental role in the successful intercept of the Egyptian airliner carrying the hijackers of the Italian cruise ship, *Achille Lauro*. *Tigertail* aircrew spoke directly to the hijackers, convincing them that the communications were coming from the two VF-103/VF-74 F-14s on their wing and persuading the airliner to divert into NAS Sigonella, IT. In August 1988, the *Tigertails* deployed aboard USS INDEPENDENCE (CV 62) for an "Around the Horn" cruise to San Diego, CA.

In August 1990, CVW-17 aboard USS SARATOGA (CV 60) rapidly responded to the Iraq invasion of Kuwait by deploying to the Red Sea. Hawkeyes from VAW-125 and CVW-3's VAW-126 flew around-the-clock as the force build-up of Operation DESERT SHIELD continued. VAW-125 flew over 890 combat hours controlling strikes on Iraqi targets while providing AEW coverage for the Red Sea Battle Group. On 17 January 1991, *Tigertail* aircrew detected two Iraqi MiG-21s threatening their strike package. *Tigertail* controllers vectored two VFA-81 F/A-18s toward the MiGs and recorded the only Navy fixed-wing air-to-air kills of DESERT STORM.

In 1992 the squadron supported United Nations' relief efforts during Operation PROVIDE PROMISE in the former Yugoslavia. In recognition of the achievements during this deployment, VAW-125 received the 1992 COMNAVAIRLANT Battle Efficiency Award and CNO Aviation Safety Award.

In January 1994, the *Tigertails* deployed aboard USS SARATOGA (CV 60) for its final sail. During the deployment, the *Tigertails* joined NATO forces flying in support of Operations DENY FLIGHT and PROVIDE PROMISE. The *Tigertails* conducted operational tests of the Navy's newest Mini-DAMA Satellite Communication Suite. Using this new system, the *Tigertails*, for the first time, functioned as an Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), a mission that continues to grow in emphasis to present day.

With the decommissioning of USS SARATOGA (CV 60), VAW-125 and CVW-17 were paired USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65). After completing a two-month Counter-Drug assignment at Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, the *Tigertails* deployed to the Mediterranean Sea aboard USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) in June 1996. In July, the *Tigertails* again joined NATO forces in the former Yugoslavia, this time in support of Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR. In September USS ENTERPRISE moved to respond to mounting tensions in Southwest Asia, and while supporting Operation SOUTHERN WATCH over the next three months, VAW-125 played a vital role in the enforcement of the southern Iraq

no-fly zone. Additionally, *Tigertail* pilots earned the CVW-17 "Top Hook" Award for carrier landing performance. The squadron was duly recognized for its achievements in 1996, being awarded the COMNAVAIRLANT Battle Efficiency Award, the CNO Safety Award, and the VAW community's AEW Excellence Award.

In March 1997, the *Tigertails* and CVW-17 joined the USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN 69) Battle Group. Deploying in June 1998, the *Tigertails* supported Operation DELIBERATE FORGE in the Adriatic Sea, participated in numerous NATO and Allied exercises in the Mediterranean Sea, and supported Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in the Arabian Gulf, when heightened tensions resumed.

In January 1999, the *Tigertails* and CVW-17 were assigned to the USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN 73) Battle Group. In early June 1999, the *Tigertails* completed a two-month Counter-Drug deployment to NAS Roosevelt Roads, PR that included the maritime intercept, boarding, and subsequent seizure and arrest of the motor vessels *Castor* and *China Breeze*. The combined drug seizure was in excess of 20,000 pounds of cocaine, which was the largest Atlantic seizure in Seventh District Coast Guard history. Following the Counter-Drug detachment, the squadron transitioned to the E-2C Group II (Nav Upgrade) airframe. Diverse operational tasking followed including post-hurricane North Carolina SAR missions and two CNO Special Projects in Joint Tactical Information Data System (JTIDS) exercises as well as standard inter-deployment cycle operations. In June of 2000, the *Tigertails* and CVW-17 deployed aboard USS GEORGE WASHINGTON supporting Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, JOINT FORCE/JOINT GUARDIAN as well as NATO Exercise DESTINED GLORY. The squadron was again awarded the COMNAVAIRLANT Battle "E" for readiness.

Within hours of the unprecedented terrorist attacks and national crisis of 11 September 2001, squadron personnel were embarked at sea, leaving NS Norfolk with minimal logistics support and literally nothing more than the shirts on their backs. Transported to USS GEORGE WASHINGTON, VAW-125 maintenance personnel immediately began dedicated aircraft launch and recovery operations while others prepared ship spaces, established supply requirements, and readied lines of communication to support Operation NOBLE EAGLE. Squadron aircraft flew numerous Command and Control missions in the New York City vicinity in the days following the attacks as commercial air traffic slowly resumed.

In June of 2002, the *Tigertails* and CVW-17 again deployed aboard USS GEORGE WASHINGTON. The Battle Group played vital roles in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM over Afghanistan and Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in Iraq, prepping the battlefield for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. For the deployment, the squadron won the CVW-17 "Top Hook" award, including five of six line periods, the inaugural AEWINGLANT Top Hook Award, and the COMNAVAIRLANT Battle "E."

In April 2003, the *Tigertails* became the first East Coast squadron to transition to the E-2C Hawkeye 2000, which boasts improved electrical and vapor cycle systems, mission computer and display stations, and Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC). The squadron was designated to operationally evaluate the AN/USG-3 airborne node of the Navy's net-centric CEC sensor fusion system.

On October 1, 2003 VAW-125 achieved a milestone of 35 years and 68,000 flight hours Class "A" mishap-free. This record serves as a testament to safety awareness throughout the command's existence. VAW-125 stands ready to meet its worldwide commitments and responsibilities in the long-standing *Tigertail* tradition of being *Torchbearers* for our nation's forces.