

VAW-117 WALLBANGERS COMMAND HISTORY

The squadron was established at NAS North Island, CA on 1 July 1974 as part of Fighter Airborne Early Warning Wing, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and received its first E-2B aircraft in October 1974. The squadron deployed to the Mediterranean Sea on board the USS INDEPENDENCE (CV 62) in October of 1975. The squadron made its first Western Pacific (WestPac) deployment with Carrier Air Wing TWO on board the USS RANGER (CV 61) in February 1979.

The year 1981 found the Wallbangers joining Carrier Air Wing ELEVEN for WestPac on board the USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) and winning the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Safety Award. The Wallbangers were also the Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet's nominee for the Airborne Early Warning Excellence Award. After winning the 1983 CNO Safety Award and the Battle "E", VAW-117 deployed again on the Enterprise for WESTPAC 1984. Due in part to compiling a West Coast record of over 2,000 flight hours in 1984, the Wallbangers captured the first ever triple crown of the west coast AEW community by winning the 1984 CNO Safety Award, Battle "E", and AEW Excellence Award.

During the 1988 WestPac onboard the USS ENTERPRISE, VAW-117 played a key role in "OPERATION PRAYING MANTIS" during which an Iranian ship was destroyed. In addition, the Wallbangers excelled in providing command and control during the attacks on oil platforms and small ships.

In 1990, the Wallbangers transitioned to the Grumman E-2C Plus and participated in a joint US/Canadian exercise called "MAPLE FLAG 1990" in Canadian Air Force Base Cold Lake, Alberta, Canada, before joining the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (CVN 72) for her maiden voyage around South America. This was the first operational deployment of the E-2C (Plus) aircraft and served as the operational test and evaluation for this aircraft.

The onset of "OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM" led to the most accelerated turn around training cycle ever and deployment in 1991. Onboard the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN's maiden WestPac Voyage in May of 1991, VAW-117 assisted in the evacuation of dependents from the Philippines after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo during "OPERATION FIERY VIGIL." The Wallbangers were awarded the Joint Meritorious Unit Award for their efforts in assisting in the evacuation.

In October on 1993, the Wallbangers were called to provide air traffic control services for over 400 aircraft daily while supporting "OPERATION RESTORE HOPE" in Somalia. For its effort in 1993, VAW-117 again won the coveted AEW triple crown.

Upgrading to the Grumman E-2C Group II in 1994, the Wallbangers participated in "ROVING SANDS 1994," the premiere Department of Defense exercise. In October of 1994, the Banger maintenance department received a grade of "Overall Outstanding" on the Aircraft Maintenance Evaluation, thereby establishing the Wallbanger Maintenance Department as the best of any squadron on the West Coast.

In April of 1995 the Wallbangers departed for WestPac 1995 with Carrier Air Wing ELEVEN onboard the LINCOLN. 1995 was the most successful year in the 22 years of Wallbanger history. Besides the "PriceFighter Award", the Bangers earned the 1995 Battle "E", the 1995 Grandpaw Pettibone Award, the Secretary of Defense Maintenance Award, the CNO Airborne Early Warning Excellence Award, and the Energy Conservation Award. A one-year turnaround put VAW-117 on deployment again in October 1996 on board the USS KITTY HAWK (CV 63) for another WestPac cruise.

During the WestPac 1997 cruise, the Wallbangers had the unique opportunity to fly with the Pakistani Air Force in an exercise dubbed "INSPIRED ALERT". "INSPIRED ALERT" was a series of overland power projection strikes coupled with joint air combat maneuvering scenarios in which the Wallbangers provided the essential link from strike planning, Command, Control and Communication, (also known as C3), to all fighter close control.

In October of 1997, the Wallbangers bid the USS KITTY HAWK (CV 63) farewell and ushered in a new era for VAW-117 by joining the USS CARL VINSON (CVN 70). In all, during 1997, VAW-117 completed another post cruise abbreviated turnaround, flying 442 sorties for a total of 1,335.2 mishap free flight hours. In addition, in 1997 the Wallbangers were awarded several awards including the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, Price Fighter Award, (Third Consecutive); CNO Safety "S"; and the Commander, Airborne Early Warning Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet Quarterly Safety Award. Lastly in 1997, the Wallbangers dedication to safety allowed them to surpass a major milestone of over 20 years and 44,000 hours of mishap free flying.

The Wallbangers were busy preparing for the upcoming Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf deployment in 1998. Notably, the Bangers participated in the RIMPAC 98 exercise with the US Air Force and several foreign naval services. The CNO awarded VAW-117 with both the Grandpaw Pettibone Award and the Price Fighter Award for FY97, which further demonstrates the squadron's commitment to safety and a dedication to doing things the right way everytime. At the completion of the turnaround cycle, the Wallbangers were part of another milestone as they took on the informal title of the "last operational Navy Squadron at (once 'Fightertown') Miramar" after leaving for the last time on deployment. The squadron flew an incredible 665 sorties and amassed over 1716 mishap free flight hours in 1998.

During WestPac 1998/1999 the Wallbangers won acclaim for their outstanding command and control efforts on more than 97 sorties, which included 27 combat missions in support of OPERATION SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW) and OPERATION DESERT FOX (ODF). In addition, VAW-117 also participated in exercises NAUTICAL ARTIST, NEON FALCON, EAGER ARCHER and GULFEX 99 with the United States Air Force, the British Royal Navy and various allies. Several Bangers had the unique opportunity to participate in an informative British officer exchange program with the 849 Squadron 'A' Flight "AARDVARKS" onboard the HMS INVINCIBLE.

Upon returning from WestPac 1998/1999, the Wallbangers rejoined their sister squadron's at the new west coast Hawkeye Country, NAS Point Mugu. The Wallbangers continued to pave the wave for the Hawkeye community and in May 1999, the Commander, Airborne Early Warning Wing Pacific, selected the Wallbangers to perform the Operational Test and Evaluation for the new Mission Computer Upgrade (MCU)/Advanced Control Indicator Sets (ACIS).

The new MCU/ACIS gave the Wallbangers a distinct advantage in their command and control capabilities with better tracking, computer processing and display capabilities. When the Wallbangers deployed again in July 2001 for WESTPAC 2001-02, they were the only Hawkeye squadron in the fleet to have the new MCU/ACIS system.

WESTPAC 2001-02 onboard the USS CARL VINSON (CVN-70) proved to be a rewarding deployment for the Wallbangers. After the terrorist bombings of Sept. 11th, 2001, the Wallbangers and CARRIER AIR WING 11 were among the first aircraft to lead in the strikes on Afghanistan as part of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM. The Wallbangers flew an unprecedented amount of combat sorties in support of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM. The extensive radar and communication equipment on board the E-2C Hawkeye allowed the Wallbangers to become a vital part of our nation's anti-terrorist operations. The Wallbangers continuously provided battle space management over Pakistan and southern Afghanistan, ensuring the safety of all airborne assets and deconfliction with commercial airways. They served as an information clearing house, providing a communications relay between command authorities on the ground and tactical aircraft airborne. What began as an operation that consisted mainly of carrier-based naval air assets evolved into a multi-service and multi-faceted, joint operation. The Wallbangers were crucial in ensuring the smooth integration of aircraft from Navy, Air Force, and allied nations.

The WESTPAC 2001-02 deployment was notably successful. The Bangers were proud to end their last deployment on the VINSON by winning the Captains Cup Trophy and the Grandpaw Pettibone Award for Safety. After their deployment, the Bangers were also awarded the 2001 Battle "E" award and CNO Safety "S".

The Wallbangers joined the USS NIMITZ (CVN-68) Strike Group in 2003 while preparing for another WESTPAC deployment. They continued to aggressively spearhead the Hawkeye community in the transition towards Hawkeye 2000, the Navy's newest E-2 aircraft. The Bangers were the first fleet squadron to receive these aircraft and conducted the Operational Testing and Evaluation of the new Hawkeye 2000.

In addition to the Bangers new aircraft, they were also the first fleet Hawkeye squadron to receive the Cooperative Engagement Capabilities system (CEC). CEC is the navy's new and most comprehensive data link system and once fully operational, will drastically improved the battlegroup's situational awareness and self-defense capabilities. CEC allows the Navy to better employ its surface and air assets by combining sensor data to produce a composite air and surface picture for component commanders. The integrated air picture and shared fire control data provided through the use of CEC enables a Carrier Strike Group to operate as a more cohesive unit, sharing the capabilities of detecting, tracking and engaging enemy aircraft and missiles.

The mighty USS Nimitz sailed out of San Diego on March 3, 2003 beginning WESTPAC2003. One day later, on March 4th, four mighty hummers from VAW-117 departed Point Mugu for the carrier.

The Nimitz arrived in the Gulf in early April 2003, relieving the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. On April 7th, the first day on-station in the Gulf, two VAW-117 E-2s on night training events were diverted into Iraq a day early to assist the VAW-115 "Liberty Bells" fighting the good fight near the Euphrates River. The Wallbanger crew charged into Iraqi territory without hesitancy and proved themselves worthy. In addition to flying 266 combat sorties, VAW-117 took the opportunity to augment OIF with special tasking and unit level training. When President Bush visited troops in Qatar, VAW-117 flew around the clock as the primary Command and Control platform. VAW-117 also conducted Air Defense Exercises with the Nimitz Battle Group, the last of which took place in mid August.

The Wallbangers completed WESTPAC2003 this past November. It was the Wallbangers' longest deployment totaling eight months and one day. The squadron flew more than 260 combat sorties in direct support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM while logging in excess of 1935 hours and recording more than 690 carrier arrested landings. For the second consecutive deployment, VAW-117 was charged with the fleet introduction of a new aircraft. Adding to these impressive achievements, VAW-117 was twice recognized by COMAEWWINGPAC for maintaining an impeccable safety record. The Wallbangers have operated for over 26 years since their last Class 'A' mishap.

There are approximately 160 enlisted and officer personnel that encompass the Wallbanger team. While their backgrounds vary, they have come together to form a mighty, war-fighting squadron that is known for its safety and excellence in all walks of the aviation community. VAW-117 has embraced with enthusiasm the opportunity to pave the way for the future of the VAW community and will continue in it's strive for excellence.