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HISTORY OF VAW-126

Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SIX is a major element of the airborne early warning (AEW) forces of the U. S. Navy. Even though the capabilities of the aircraft have been demonstrated as being exceptionally versatile, the primary "classical" mission of the squadron is to provide the Task Force Commander with early warning of impending enemy attack.

The airborne early warning capability of the highly sophisticated E-2A "Hawkeye" represents an amazing evolution from the modest beginnings of AEW during World War II. Aircraft which pioneered the development of carrier based AEW were the TBM-3W "Avenger" and the AD-5W "Skyraider". Still operational and effective, in addition to the E-2A, is the E-1B "Tracer" aircraft.

Although a deficiency in early warning was apparent during World War II, little could be done until the completion of hostilities. A development and training program produced VAW-2 on 6 July 1948 at NAS Quonset Point, Rhode Island.

Growing in scope and capability through the years, the AEW mission has continued to reach greater heights of achievement, size and importance as weaponry has increased in speed, range and destructiveness. With this growth of AEW came the expansion of VAW-2 into VAW-12, the largest carrier based squadron on the East Coast. Flight crews expanded from three to four and, with the E-2A, to five members.

With the appearance of the E-2A and its larger crews and support complement, it was decided to commission several smaller units to carry out the AEW mission on each attack carrier. VAW-12 became the present Carrier Airborne Early Warning Wing TWELVE, which directs the AEW capability of the Commander Naval Air Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, from Norfolk, Virginia.

Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SIX (VAW-126) was commissioned on 1 April 1969, at which time Commander Albert W. OLDHAM assumed command as the first Commanding Officer. VAW-126 was the last East Coast E-2A squadron to be formed. Shortly after commissioning, VAW-126 was assigned to Attack Carrier Air Wing SEVENTEEN aboard USS FORRESTAL (CVA59). In early August 1969, VAW-126 began seven months of intensive refresher training aboard FORRESTAL with CVW-17. On 24 October 1969, VAW-126 departed aboard FORRESTAL for its first Operational readiness inspection and achieved the highest score of any East Coast E-2A squadron on its initial readiness inspection. On 2 December the squadron departed on its first seven month Mediterranean deployment.

Upon returning to the United States in July 1970, VAW-126 began receiving the new E-2B aircraft, equipped with new computer systems designed to increase the speed and accuracy of mission performance. During the summer months the squadron also experienced its first Administrative/Material Inspection, given by Commander Fleet Air Norfolk, in which every phase of squadron operations was inspected for efficiency and effectiveness. VAW-126 was the first squadron under COMFAIRNORFOLK to receive an outstanding on this type inspection in over four years.

Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SIX then began preparing for its second extended deployment to the Mediterranean, scheduled to begin early in January 1971. During this period, Commander HARP was relieved by Commander Floyd A. FRIESEN at Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia on 30 December 1970.