

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VAW-126 SEAHAWKS

Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY SIX is an integral part of the tactical air forces of the United States Navy. VAW-126 is one of seven Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadrons based in Norfolk. Equipped with four E-2C "Hawkeye" aircraft, the squadron's primary mission is long range airborne early warning in defense of the Carrier Battle Group. In addition, the squadron plays a vital role in such diverse operations as fighter intercept and air strike control, ocean surveillance and search and rescue coordination.

VAW-126 was commissioned in Norfolk, Virginia on the 1st of April, 1969. Originally named "CLOSEOUT," the new squadron, with its four E-2A aircraft, became part of Attack Carrier Air Wing SEVENTEEN assigned to the USS FORRESTAL (CV 59). Following completion of their first deployment in July 1970, the squadron transitioned to the E-2B. This was a newer version of the same aircraft, equipped with a more flexible, digital computer weapons system. The command received accolades early in its history, winning the highly coveted COMNAVAIRLANT Battle Readiness Efficiency "E" and the CNO Safety Award in 1971. The squadron won the Battle "E" a second time in 1974.

While homeward bound in September 1974, the squadron transferred to the USS AMERICA (CV 66) from the USS FORRESTAL. The NATO deployment also marked VAW-126's final E-2B flying as well. Following their return to Norfolk in October 1974, the squadron began its transition to the E-2C Hawkeye, an aircraft similar in appearance to its predecessor, but with a significantly more capable and reliable weapons system.

In August 1975, the squadron commenced operations in the Caribbean with their future air wing, CVW-9, based at NAS Miramar, California. In May 1976, they began the first of many trips moving the entire squadron back and forth between Norfolk and Miramar to operate with CVW-9 and prepare for their upcoming deployment on the USS CONSTELLATION (CV 64). In May 1978, VAW-126 returned to the West Coast and rejoined CVW-9 to prepare for the squadron's second and final Western Pacific deployment.

The CLOSEOUTS changed their name to the SEAHAWKS in memory of their Commanding Officer, CDR Vady Clark who passed away suddenly in May 1979.

The SEAHAWKS joined the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV 67)/CVW-1 team upon returning to the East coast. In July 1981, VAW-126 joined CVW-3 which replaced CVW-1 as the air wing deployed aboard KENNEDY.

The September 83' to May 84' deployment was a record breaking one for VAW-126. Many monthly and quarterly records were set. In addition to receiving the 1983 Battle "E," the squadron won the COMNAVAIRLANT "Silver Anchor" award for superior retention and the Airborne Early Warning Excellence Award as the best VAW squadron in the Navy.

The SEAHAWKS departed for the Mediterranean aboard KENNEDY in August, 1986. Upon their return in March 1987, VAW-126 kept active by participating in a variety of exercises including a MISSILEX off of Brunswick, Maine and the VACAPES OPAREA, AEGIS support and drug interdiction. By November the squadron was back aboard KENNEDY in preparation for their next deployment.

1988 was an outstanding year for the SEAHAWKS. The SEAHAWKS were awarded the COMNAVAIRLANT Battle Readiness "E," Meritorious Unit Commendation, and won the CVW-3 and CAEWING 12 nomination for the Secretary of Defense Maintenance Excellence Award. In June, the Battle Group assembled for FLEETEX 2-88 and the SEAHAWKS departed with KENNEDY on August 2nd for its six month deployment. Early January marked the shootdown of two Libyan Mig-23 "Flogger" aircraft by SEAHAWK controlled fighters.

The SEAHAWKS set sail with the USS John F. Kennedy Battle Group in August 1990 for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. During Desert Shield and Desert Storm the SEAHAWKS accumulated over 2850 flight hours. On June 8th, the squadron led a mixture of CVW-3 aircraft in a victory fly-by in Washington D.C.

In late 1993 the CVW-3 team was reassigned to the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69) and began workups for the October 1994 Mediterranean deployment. The Seahawks were also awarded the 1994 Battle 'E' and the Airborne Early Warning Excellence award.

In late 1995, the CVW-3 team was once again reassigned, this time to the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN-71) Battle Group. In late November '96, the Seahawks deployed to the Mediterranean. With the new year came new challenges. The Seahawks headed for Bosnia and Adriatic Operations. While in the Adriatic the Seahawks flew several missions over the beach and provided NATO flight following, ABCCC, AEW, and ES support.

In November 1998, VAW-126 deployed aboard USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) for JTG 99-1. In its first few months, the squadron participated in Arabian Gulf operations including Operations Desert Fox and Southern Watch. VAW-126 also participated in Juniper Stallion, INVITEX, and in Kosovo operations. In all the squadron and everyone aboard USS ENTERPRISE transited the Suez Canal four times. The Enterprise Battle Group wrapped up the deployment in the Arabian Gulf in April 1999. Flying in support of Operation DESERT FOX, the Seahawks were often the deciding factor on whether or not allied forces could fly into Southern Iraq. After leaving the Gulf in April 1998 The Roosevelt turned over with the USS ENTERPRISE on 12 May 1999 and returned to Norfolk on 6 May 1999.

From July to September of 1999 VAW-126 participated in counter-narcotics operations, based out of Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. The SEAHAWKS were tasked with the monitoring and detection of illegal drug operations in the Caribbean Sea in cooperation with the Joint Interagency Task Force. After returning from Puerto Rico VAW-126 also assisted in air control for the massive search and rescue effort to rescue Hurricane Floyd survivors in North Carolina.

VAW-126 deployed onboard the Navy's newest aircraft carrier USS HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN75) from November 2000 to May 2001. Their time was spent in the Mediterranean and Arabian Seas flying over 850 flight hours in support of Operation Southern Watch. The SEAHAWKS maintenance professionals earned two Golden Wrench Awards while deployed. Following deployment, the SEAHAWKS spent several weeks in Puerto Rico supporting anti-drug efforts in that region.

Under the command of CDR Stephen N. Thompson, the SEAHAWKS began another workup schedule in March 2002. The workups included TESTA 1 / 2, SFARP

Fallon, Air Wing Fallon, COMPTUEX and JTFEX. VAW-126 is scheduled to deploy
December 2002.