



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

STRIKE FIGHTER SQUADRON 25
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From: Commanding Officer, Strike Fighter Squadron TWO FIVE
To: Director of Naval History (N09BH)

Subj: ANNUAL COMMAND HISTORY, CY 1996

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

Encl: (1) Command history
(2) Photograph, aircraft 400
(3) Photograph, aircraft 410
(4) Photograph, CDR B.J. Brocato and CDR R.L. Welch

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosure (1) through (4) are forwarded.

B.J. Brocato
B.J. BROCATO

VFA-25 "THE FIST OF THE FLEET" COMMAND HISTORY, 1996

1. Command Composition and Organization.

a. The mission of Strike Fighter Squadron TWO FIVE is to maintain a maximum state of air combat readiness, serving as a deterrent against all potential enemies of the United States of America. The primary function of Strike Fighter Squadron TWO FIVE within that mission is to conduct offensive air to air and air to surface strike operations as directed by national command authority.

2. Organizational Structure.

a. VFA-25 is home based at Naval Air Station Lemoore, California, under the functional command of the Commander, Strike Fighter Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet. Operational command is provided by Commander, Carrier Air Wing FOURTEEN (CVW 14). Commanding officers during calendar year 1996 were CDR Rodger L. Welch (25 May 95-29 July 96) and CDR Barry J. Brocato (29 July 96 - present). VFA-25 maintains ten FA-18C Hornets, carrying the tailcode "NK". Current bureau numbers are as follows:

<u>Side #</u>	<u>Bureau #</u>	<u>Build Lot</u>
400	164633	XIV
401	164681	XIV
402	164637	XIV
403	164639	XIV
404	164642	XIV
405	164645	XIV
406	164654	XIV
407	164660	XIV
410	164676	XIV
411	164262	XIII

b. All aircraft are night vision goggle compatible and are capable of delivering the latest self-designated precision laser guided weapons. Additionally, they carry the AIM-120 AMRAAM missile in the air to air role.

3. Chronology, 1996.

01-31 Jan: NAS Lemoore, local training
16 Jan: Pre-deployment Material Condition Inspection (MCI) of all VFA-25 aircraft
26-31 Jan: NAS Lemoore, Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP)
01-07 Feb: NAS Lemoore, FCLP
07-18 Feb: USS CARL VINSON (CVN-70), FLEETEX
18-28 Feb: NAS Lemoore, local training
29 Feb: NAS Lemoore, FCLP
01-08 Mar: NAS Lemoore, FCLP
09-18 Mar: USS CARL VINSON (CVN-70), JTFEX
19-25 Mar: Conventional Weapons Tactical Proficiency (CWTP) evaluation

Encl (1)

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18-31 Mar: NAS Lemoore, NATOPS unit eval, "Smart Weapons" training
01-14 Apr: NAS Lemoore, local area training
09-12 Apr: Two plane detachment to NAS Pt. Magu for AGM-84E SLAM
missile test and evaluation support
08-14 Apr: NAS Lemoore, FCLP
15-19 Apr: Carrier refresher landings aboard USS CARL VINSON,
with operations conducted from NAS Lemoore
19-30 Apr: NAS Lemoore, local area training
14-30 Apr: POM begins, (pre-deployment leave period)
01-13 May: NAS Lemoore, local area training
08 May: Pre-deployment fair in hangar bay for dependents
14 May: Embark aboard USS CARL VINSON (CVN-70) for WESTPAC 96 at NAS
Alameda, CA.
14-18 May: Underway, CVN-70 in W-291 area off San Diego for airwing
carrier qualification
19-29 May: Transit Northern Pacific, blue water flight operations
30-31 May: In port, Yokosuka, Japan.
02-06 Jun: Underway, airwing strike on Iwo Jima, opposed by local
Air Force F-15 assets.
07-11 Jun: In port, Hong Kong
12-15 Jun: Underway
16-20 Jun: In port, Singapore
21 Jun: Underway, transit off Jakarta, Indonesia, with VFA-25
leading CVW14 air wing pass in review over local airshow
22-30 Jun: Indian Ocean, blue water operations
25 Jun: Crossing the line ceremony, King Neptune cures "Fist" wogs
01 Jul: Transit Straits of Hormuz, underway in Arabian Gulf
03 Jul: On station, Northern Arabian Gulf
05 Jul: Operation SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW) sorties commence over
Southern Iraq
10 Jul: Steel Beach picnic, no flight operations, underway
11-16 Jul: Resume OSW sorties
17 Jul: No flight operations
18-25 Jul: Exercise RUGGED NAUTILUS begins, congruent with OSW
20-21 Jul: 24 hour surge-ex, continuous flight operations
26 Jul: No flight operations
27-30 Jul: In port, Jebal Ali, United Arab Emirates
29 Jul: Change of command, in port. CDR B.J. Brocato relieves
CDR R.L. Welch on foc's'le of USS CARL VINSON
31 Jul: Underway, refresher landings
01-15 Aug: OSW sorties, CVOA-4
16 Aug: Transit Straits of Hormuz, exit Arabian Gulf
17-20 Aug: In port, Muscat, Oman
21 Aug: Transit, Straits of Hormuz, enter Arabian Gulf, resume
flight operations
23 Aug: Flight deck temperature recorded at 133 degrees in the shade
of the carrier's superstructure
25-31 Aug: OSW sorties, CVOA-4
01 Sep: No flight operations, Operation Desert Strike Contingency
planning

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02-05 Sep: OSW sorties, CVOA-4
03 Sep: Operation Desert Strike. VFA-25 flies defensive counter air (DCA) missions over theater allies and in the vicinity of CVN-70. OSW "no fly zone" is extended from the 32nd to the 33rd parallel
06 Sep: No flight operations
07-14 Sep: OSW sorties
15-17 Sep: No flight operations
18-19 Sep: OSW sorties
19 Sep: USS ENTERPRISE joins USS CARL VINSON in Arabian Gulf
20 Sep: No flight operations
21-27 Sep: OSW sorties
28 Sep: No flight operations
29-30 Sep: OSW sorties
01 Oct: No flight operations, transit Straits of Hormuz, exit Arabian Gulf
02-07 Oct: Flight operations during transit of Indian Ocean, simulated air strike on island of Diego Garcia
08-09 Oct: No flight operations
10-14 Oct: Flight operations
15-19 Oct: No flight operations as CVN-70 transits south of Australia in high seas.
20-24 Oct: In port, Hobart, Tasmania
25 Oct: Underway, airwing over flight of Hobart cancelled due to foul weather
26 Oct: Crossing of the line ceremony, new "Fist" wogs cured, flight operations resume
27-30 Oct: Flight operations, cross international dateline
01-02 Nov: Flight operations
03-07 Nov: In port, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
08 Nov: Underway, VFA-25 hosts 60 dependents on board for "Tiger Cruise"
09 Nov: Air power demonstration for Tigers
10 Nov: No flight operations. VFA-25 receives Meritorious Unit Commendation for the period June 1994 to December 1995
11 Nov: All ten VFA-25 aircraft fly off for NAS Lemoore as CVN-70 steams in W-291 off southern California
12 Nov: In port, NAS North Island, CA. WESTPAC 96 ends
13-30 Nov: NAS Lemoore, local operations
01-31 Dec: NAS Lemoore, local operations
13-16 Dec: Three plane detachment to Hill AFB, Utah for dissimilar aerial combat training

4. Narrative.

a. The squadron spent the month of January at NAS Lemoore, polishing air-to-ground skills on bombing ranges of NAS Fallon, NV. During the weekend of 10 Jan, VFA-25 sent a division on detachment to NAS Fallon to escape Lemoore's winter fog, accomplishing air to air

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training for a pilot undergoing his division lead syllabus. "Fist" maintenance underwent the pre-deployment Material Condition Inspection on 16 Jan. Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP) began on 26 Jan in preparation for the upcoming at sea period.

After spending the first week of February engaged in FCLP, VFA-25 flew aboard USS CARL VINSON on 7 Feb to begin FLEETEX 96. "Fist" pilots integrated with CVW 14 and battle group assets in preparation for the upcoming cruise. Highlights included a simulated mining operation of Santa Cruz Island, as well as the AIM-9/AIM-7 missile shoot on 15-16 Feb. Eight VFA-25 pilots shot at remotely piloted target drones in the missile range off the coast of Oxnard, CA. The fly-off to NAS Lemoore occurred on 18 Feb. From 18-19 Feb, "Fist" pilots flew locally on a variety of air-to-air and air-to-ground missions. FCLP commenced again on 29 Feb.

VFA-25 upgraded its aircraft to XN-8 mission computers in March, giving the squadron the latest software Operational Flight Program (OFP) for the Hornet, designated O9C.

FCLP occupied the first week of the month, with the squadron returning to CVN-70 on 9 Mar for JTFEX. The exercise focused on battlegroup integration, with Defensive Counter Air (DCA) and armed surface reconnaissance (ASR) providing the bulk of the sorties. Simulated air strikes were flown from CVN-70 to ranges near China Lake, CA., El Centro, CA., and Yuma, AZ., with CVW 9 assets providing "Orange" air opposition.

The remainder of the month was spent flying local operations, with some emphasis on "smart weapon" (Maverick, Walleye, HARM, LGB, SLAM) employment. VFA-25 passed its Conventional Weapons Tactical Proficiency Inspection (CWTPPI) in late March with the highest aggregate score ever recorded by a Hornet squadron. The squadron successfully passed its annual NATOPS evaluation at the close of the month.

A mix of air-to-air and air-to-ground training filled the first two weeks of April. On 9 April VFA-25 sent a two plane detachment to NAWC Pt. Mugu in support of AGM-84E (SLAM) missile test and evaluation. After a week of FCLP's, the squadron conducted proficiency carrier qualifications aboard CVN-70 15-19 April. VFA-25 closed the month at home, with an emphasis on radar bombing and FLIR acquisition techniques in preparation for upcoming Operation SOUTHERN WATCH missions.

The squadron embarked aboard USS CARL VINSON on 14 May for WESTPAC 96. In light of the impending base closure of NAS Alameda, this marked the final deployment of a carrier from this station. VFA-25 flew extensively during the transit across the northern Pacific Ocean. Missions included Armed Surface Reconnaissance (ASR), basic fighter maneuvers, missile intercepts (AIC), MK-76 practice bombing, and "smart weapons" captive carries. VFA-25 aircrew gained proficiency in CV operations while preparing for the upcoming time "on-station" in the Arabian Gulf.

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After in port periods in Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, VFA-25 entered the Arabian Gulf on 1 July. Previously referred to as the Persian Gulf, the name Arabian Gulf reflects current political sensitivities. Once on station, VFA-25's daily flight schedule reflected a mix of battle group support operations, unit level training and Operation SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW) sorties.

Typical battle group support operations involved multi-plane engagements utilizing surface ship radar controllers for Ground Controlled Intercept (GCI) control. VFA-25 crews also provided Defensive Counter Air (DCA) coverage for the battlegroup.

OSW sorties were fraged by the daily Air Tasking Order (ATO), normally requiring a mini-strike package for interdiction/reconnaissance sweeps over Southern Iraq. VFA-25 aircraft would refuel inflight from either internal Navy assets or theater Air Force assets prior to rendezvous with the rest of the strike package. All aircraft carried live ordnance during interdiction/reconnaissance sweeps to facilitate enforcement of the "no fly" zone south of the 32nd parallel. VFA-25 crews often carried the High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM) to provide a reaction capability against any hostile Surface to Air Missile (SAM) activity.

During the deployment, VFA-25 "Fist" aircrew mastered the utilization of radar offset bombing techniques, whereby non-radar significant targets could be located by means of nearby radar significant terrain features, enabling the FLIR to be automatically slaved directly over the desired aim point. This technique dramatically increased successful target acquisition rates.

During the month of July, VFA-25 participated in Exercise RUGGED NAUTILUS. This operation demonstrated inter-service capabilities in the Arabian Gulf, bringing a Joint Forces Command and Control Center (JFACC)

Aboard USS CARL VINSON. For the first time in history a JFACC generated its theater-wide air tasking orders (ATO) from a carrier underway in the Gulf. Strikes were planned to utilize both Navy and Air Force assets to constructively "destroy" practice targets.

27-30 July marked an in port period at Jebal Ali, UAE. Regional political sensitivities caused the entire battle group to be restricted to pier-side liberty. VFA-25 joined 5,000 other battle group sailors under three large circus tents erected on an immense sand lot next to the carrier. Access beyond that half mile square zone was limited to a pair of clubs located within the Jebal Ali port facility. The "Beer Gardens" of Jebal Ali provided some measure of diversion from the 130 degree heat of the Arabian summer, but VFA-25 anxiously looked forward to getting back to sea.

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Before pulling out of Jebal Ali, VFA-25 conducted a change of command ceremony on the foc'sle of USS CARL VINSON. Reflecting the operational status of the squadron, CDR B.J. Brocato relieved CDR R.L. Welch while sailors in dungarees and pilots in flight suits looked on.

Operation DESERT STRIKE occurred on 3 Sep, with VFA-25 augmenting DCA coverage of theater allies and CVN-70. VFA-25 departed the Arabian Gulf on 1 Oct, its pilots having completed the required 20 missions over Iraq to qualify for an Air Medal, but with the feeling among some that their skills had been under utilized.

Upon leaving the Arabian Gulf the operational tempo slowed considerably. After port visits to Hobart, Tasmania and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, VFA-25 hosted 60 dependents on board the ship for "Tiger Cruise 96". The squadron fly off occurred on 11 Nov, with the remaining personnel disembarking USS CARL VINSON on 12 Nov at NAS North Island.

WESTPAC 96 cruise statistics were impressive. Over 4,900 hours of flight time had been logged by VFA-25 aviators, with zero mishaps and zero serious injuries. Pilots averaged 93 carrier arrested landings each. VFA-25 maintenance logged an incredible 98% sortie completion rate over the cruise.

The return from deployment marked the end of VFA-25's coveted status as the top priority in the FA-18 supply system. As a result of the acute lack of spare parts, the squadron quickly went from having all ten aircraft up and ready to an average of less than five. The XN-8 computers gained before cruise were returned to a deploying squadron, which meant VFA-25 reverted back to the older 91C OFP.

November and December were quiet months for the squadron, with large numbers of personnel on leave. The commanding officer allowed a four day work week to be implemented during this time to allow sailors time to catch up with their home lives. Operationally the squadron continued to conduct a limited number of local area training flights to close out the calendar year.

5. Commanding Officer. (25 May 1995-29 July 1996) - CDR Rodger L. Welch is a native of [REDACTED] and graduated from the Naval Academy in 1979. After receiving his wings in 1981 he transitioned to the A-7E Corsair II. In 1983 he became one the first fleet aviators to fly the FA-18 with VFA-113, and participated in the first Hornet deployment aboard USS CONSTELLATION. CDR Welch's subsequent tours included an instructor tour at VFA-125, an airwing LSO tour with CVW-8 aboard USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT, and a department head tour with the VFA-86 aboard USS AMERICA. During his time with VFA-86 CDR Welch took the Hornet into combat, leading air strikes in support of Operation DESERT STORM. He logged over 110 combat flight hours in this conflict. Following DESERT STORM, CDR Welch served as executive officer of VMFAT-101 prior to

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reporting to VFA-25 in January of 1994.

6. Commanding Officer. (29 July-1996-present)- Commander Barry J. Brocato is a native of [REDACTED] and graduated from the Naval Academy in 1979. After earning his Naval Aviator's wings in 1981, he reported to NAS Lemoore to begin flying the A-7E Corsair II. Following tours with VA-192 and VA-27, CDR Brocato reported to VFA-125 for transition to the FA-18 Hornet. In 1988 he transferred to CVW-5 as airwing LSO aboard USS MIDWAY, forward deployed in the Western Pacific. Following this tour, he returned to Lemoore for instructor duty at Strike Fighter Weapons School Pacific (SFWSP). In 1991, he returned to VFA-27 for a department head tour. CDR Brocato earned a master's degree in Strategic Studies and National Security from the Naval War College prior to reporting to VFA-25 in May of 1995.

7. Supporting Documents.

a. Enclosures (2) and (3) are 8x12 photographs of squadron aircraft taken during the calendar year. Enclosure (4) is a photograph of Commanding Officer CDR B. J. Brocato.