

AIRSCOOP

Edited by Wendy Leland



VQ-1 MAKES VALIANT RETURN

On 31 March, an EP-3E *Aries II* of Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron (VQ) 1, NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., was operating in international air space over the South China Sea when it was intercepted by two People's Republic of China fighter aircraft. The EP-3E was flying straight and level on autopilot when the tail of one of the fighters impacted its number-one engine propeller. As the autopilot disengaged, the aircraft made a steep left turn and lost 7,000–8,000 feet of altitude until the

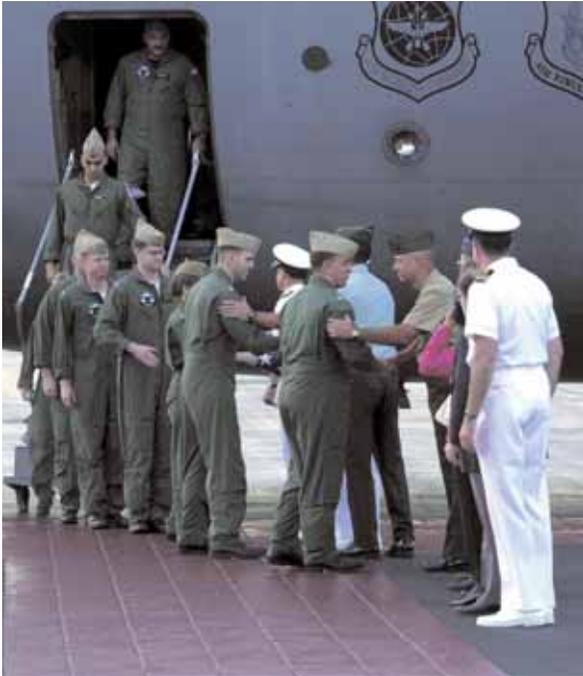


pilots regained control. The *Aries II*—which had sustained damage to two engines and its fuselage and lost its nose cone in the collision—made an emergency landing on Hainan Island, China, after broadcasting numerous maydays. The crew members were not injured; the Chinese pilot was lost at sea.

The 24-member American crew was detained until 12 April, when Operation Valiant Return commenced as a Continental Airlines jet retrieved the crew from



Left, the crew members of the VQ-1 EP-3E that landed in China after a collision with a Chinese fighter pose with the flight attendants of the Continental Airlines plane that retrieved them following their release on 12 April. Below left, the crew disembarks at Hickam AFB, Hawaii, to begin debriefing. An ecstatic crowd gathered at NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., to welcome them home on 14 April, below. Bottom, pilot Lt. Shane Osborn, the first to deplane at Whidbey, is welcomed by his father with a bear hug.



TSgt. Paul Holcomb, USAF



PH2 Michael Watkins

LCdr. Joe Quirk



China and flew them to Guam, where they departed on an Air Force C-17 for two days of debriefing in Hawaii. A Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 61 C-9B *Skytrain II* carried the EP-3E crew from Hawaii to a hero's welcome at Whidbey on 14 April. At presstime, the plane was still being held in China.

The *Aries II* crew consisted of the following Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force personnel:

VQ-1: Lt. Pat Honeck, Lt. Shane Osborn, Ltjg. John Comerford, Ltjg. Regina Kauffman, Ltjg. Ricky Payne, Ltjg. Jeff Vignery, ADCS Nick Mellos, AT2 Dave Cecka, AT2 Scott Guidry, AT2 Ramon Mercado, AD2 Wendy Westbrook, AE3 Steve Blocher, CTT2 Jason Hanser, and CTTSN Bradford Borland.

Naval Security Group Activity, Misawa, Japan: Lt. Marcia Sonon, Ens. Richard Bensing, CTO1 Shawn Coursen, CTI1 Josef Edmunds, CTI2 Brandon Funk, CTI2 Kenneth Richter, CTI3 Rodney Young, CTRSN Jeremy Crandall, and Marine Sgt. Richard Pray.

390th Intelligence Squadron, Kadena AB, Okinawa, Japan: Air Force SrA Curtis Towne.

Action over Iraq

On 16 February, U.S. and British planes launched strikes against ground targets around Baghdad, Iraq, in response to an increased threat against aircraft patrolling the no-fly zone over southern Iraq. On 22 February, Iraqi ground forces fired against U.S. and British aircraft, prompting a retaliatory strike by F/A-18 *Hornets* from *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75), which fired Joint Standoff Weapons.

JDAM Production Proceeds

The Boeing Co., St. Louis, Mo., received a \$235 million contract for production of Joint Direct Attack Munition kits for the Navy and Air Force. To convert existing warheads into smart bombs, the Navy will receive 672 kits, which include a tail section that contains a mission computer, inertial measurement unit, global positioning system receiver and battery-operated actuators to control movable fins. Strakes attached to the body of the warhead provide aerodynamic stability.

ANA Symposium

The 2001 Association of Naval Aviation Symposium and Convention will be held at the Sheraton Harbor Island Hotel in San Diego, Calif., from 24–26 May. Topics of discussion are “Alpha Strike Vietnam,” “Naval Aviation: Issues and Answers,” and “A Few Good Men: Marine Aviators in Combat.” For reservations or more information call the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation at 800-327-5002.

For the Record

The Navy’s newest aircraft carrier, *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76), was christened by former First Lady Nancy Reagan in a ceremony at Newport News Shipbuilding, Va., on 4 March.

Harriers Get Scoped

Commercial blendable borescope technology to repair jet engines without removing them from the airframe, developed by Pratt & Whitney, Hartford, Conn., has been adapted for use in the AV-8B *Harrier II*. Two borescopes—one with miniature grinding tools attached, the other with a video camera (right)—are inserted into a damaged engine through servicing ports to grind engine blades smooth after they have suffered foreign object damage. Pratt & Whitney is contracted to provide borescope teams when needed by the Marine Corps to repair *Harrier* engines.



Harriers Strike with Litening II



The Litening II targeting pod completed integration testing at NAS Patuxent River, Md. The pod gives the AV-8B *Harrier II* the ability to deliver precision-guided munitions, and improves its day and night target acquisition and low-level night flight capabilities.



The Boeing Co., St. Louis, Mo., received several Navy contracts recently: a \$36.4 million contract for FY 01 production of the **Standoff Land Attack Missile–Expanded Response**; a seven-year contract worth \$150 million for continued support of **F/A-18 Hornet**, **F-14 Tomcat** and **SH-60B Seahawk** aircraft at the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center, NAS Fallon, Nev.; and a \$69 million contract for low-rate initial production of 15 **Advanced Targeting Forward Looking Infrared** systems and spares.

In February, the Naval Air Systems Command issued a directive reducing the inspection intervals for Navy and Marine Corps **CH-46E Sea Knights** from 25 to 10 flight hours to monitor fatigue-related cracking in the forward longitudinal differential bellcrank.

The Department of Defense issued a reminder that the **Korean War Service Medal** is still available to veterans who served between 25 June 1950 and 27 July 1953, among other qualifications. For more information, call the Air Force Personnel Center at 800-558-1404.



James Darcy

The X-31 thrust-vectoring technology demonstrator completed its first flight period at NAS Patuxent River, Md., in April. Thrust vectoring—which uses paddle-like vanes to redirect the engine’s exhaust plume, allowing control and lift at speeds and angles that would otherwise induce a stall, up to 70 degrees angle of attack—is being studied for extremely short takeoff and landing applications in a carrier environment. The X-31 is a joint venture of the Navy, Germany’s federal defense procurement agency, the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Corp. and the Boeing Co.

Mishaps

A TAV-8B *Harrier II* of Marine Attack Training Squadron 203 crashed aboard MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., on 3 February. Both aviators were killed.

On 21 February, a T-45A *Goshawk* of Training Squadron 22 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean. The

two instructor pilots on board, who were observing training flights on *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN 69), were killed.

The aircrew of an Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 9 F/A-18C was not injured when their *Hornet* was damaged by a birdstrike and suffered an engine fire near China Lake, Calif., on 1 March.

On 19 March, an enlisted Sailor was killed in a flight deck accident involving an SH-60B *Seahawk* of Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron Light 49 aboard *Thach* (FFG 43) in the Pacific Ocean.

An F/A-18C *Hornet* of Strike Fighter Squadron 37 accidentally dropped ordnance on a forward air controller position at a firing range in Kuwait during a live-fire exercise on 23 March. Six people on the ground were killed, and five injured.

An EP-3E *Aries II* of Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron 1 was damaged in a midair collision with a Chinese F-8 fighter over the South China Sea on 31 March. The 24 crew members were not injured (see pp. 6–7).

An F-14A *Tomcat* of Fighter Squadron 101 was damaged but the aircrew uninjured following a wheels-up landing aboard Fentress Field, Va., on 9 April.



The first AH-1Z arrived on 31 March at NAS Patuxent River, Md., to continue the flight testing program begun in December 2000 at Bell Helicopter Textron’s facilities in Arlington, Texas.