

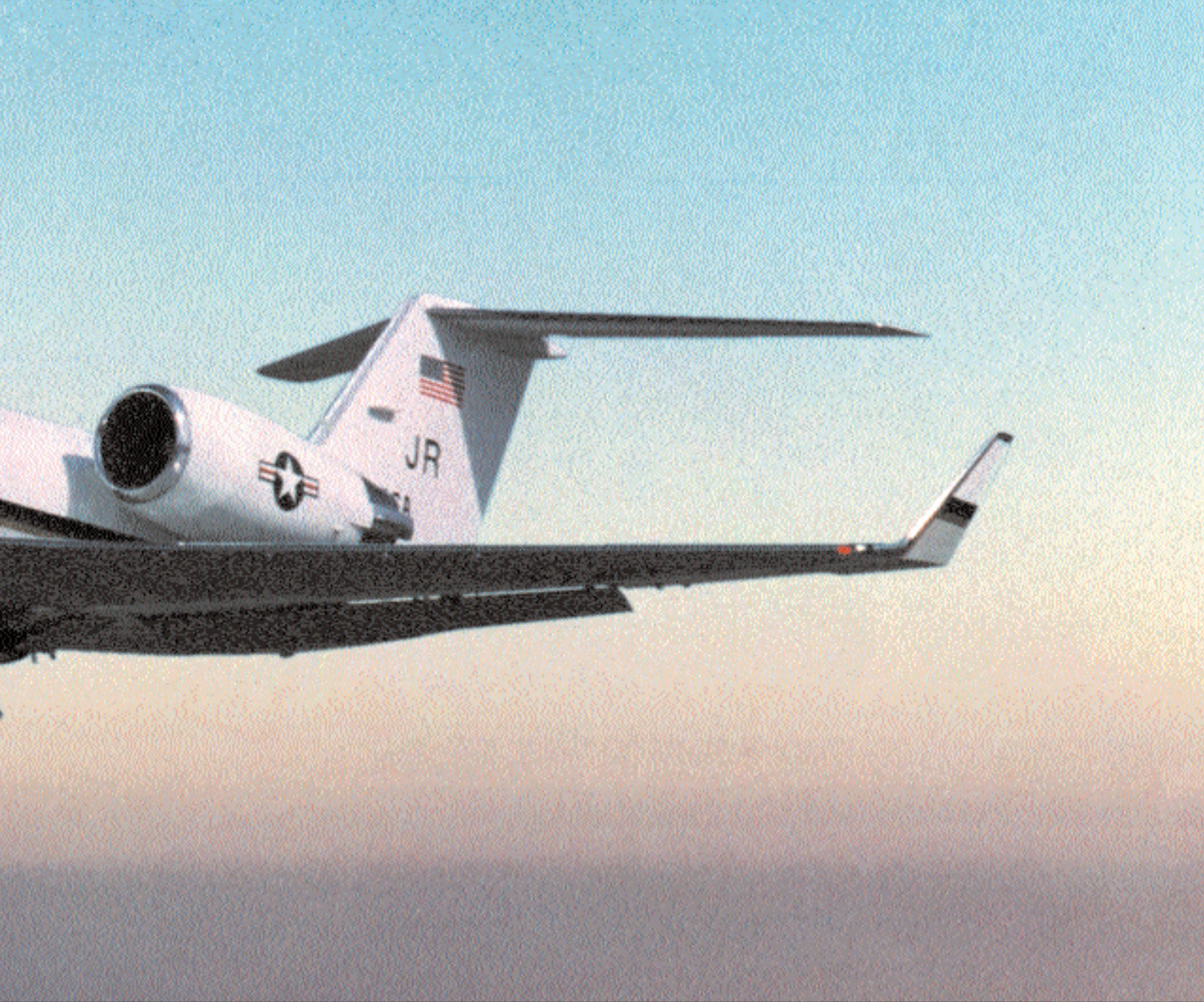


RESERVE SQUADRON

By Ltjg. John Jeppi, USNR

At 1300 hours on 13 September 2001, two days after the terrorist attacks on America, LCdr. Doug Rhodes taxied his C-20G *Gulfstream IV* down the runway at Andrews AFB, Md. He was en route to NAS Sigonella, Sicily, to recover active duty personnel concluding a battle group exercise, as well as several family members of survivors of the Pentagon attack. It was a routine mission during a time in U.S. history that was anything but routine. “As

an airline pilot, I fly in the Northeast often. Normally, the air traffic control radios are completely clogged. When we flew out that day it was surreal because all you heard were military call signs—‘Reach,’ ‘Gunslinger,’ ‘Fighter this’ and ‘Viper that’—and even they were infrequent. You wouldn’t hear anybody on the radio for 10 minutes. It was like traveling down the Capitol Beltway at rush hour, but nobody was on the road.”



ALWAYS READY TO FLY

Rhodes, a pilot in Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VR) 48, added that it was a lonely feeling, “After September 11th we were talking to Boston Center and New York Center and there was no one else there. The magnitude of it hit us when we flew over New York City and saw smoke pouring out of the wreckage.”

Since the terrorist attacks, crews from Rhodes’ squadron, the *Capitol Skyliners*, have been flying their two transport jets 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Their frenetic pace may appear to be a ramp-up to mobilization, but it is actually business as usual for the reserve unit comprised of 25 officers (all pilots) and 108 enlisted personnel. Their tasking has changed in terms of who and what they are carrying and where and when they are flying, but their operational tempo is the same: they operate in high gear during war and peacetime. Their operations department, responsible for mission logistics, faces the biggest challenge of



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— Cdr. Timothy Schaefer

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Above, the C-20G Gulfstream IV can carry passengers and cargo at high speeds for long distances on short notice. Right, a VR-48 pilot goes through preflight checklists.



adapting to orders that can change from minute to minute. Because VR-48 was fully manned before 11 September, there was no need to recall any of the unit’s selected reservists.

“We have always taken our job very seriously, but when several thousand of our countrymen are buried in a pile of rubble that used to be the World Trade Center, we are even more ready to answer the call. We are prepared to do whatever we can to directly support our nation in its time of need,” stated commanding officer Cdr. Timothy Schaefer. A veteran pilot who has flown more than 4,000 hours in eight different military aircraft and made 235 carrier arrested landings, Schaefer is proud of his squadron’s accomplishments, “Our reservists are the epitome of the axiom ‘twice the citizen.’ I have people who commute here from Illinois, Pennsylvania and Kentucky. It winds up costing them money to be here, but they do it



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because they are proud to serve in the United States Naval Reserve.”

To the untrained eye, VR-48’s two C-20Gs resemble oversized versions of the twin-engine Lear jets frequently used to shuttle corporate executives around the globe. In reality, the planes are modified military versions of the *Gulfstream IV* and can carry more than twice as many passengers as the Lear or can be converted for cargo transport. The mission of the *Capitol Skyliners* is to

world during combat and peacetime. Two pilots, a crew chief and a loadmaster crew the jets, which are able to fly into the smaller airstrips in places such as Sicily.

This squadron is up to the challenge of performing well in a crisis such as the war on terrorism. Since the squadron began flying its two aircraft, *City of Baltimore* and *City of Annapolis*, in 1994, VR-48 has amassed more than 15,000 flight hours without incident. The squadron has won the Battle “E” twice and the CNO Safety Award, among other honors.

Reservists realize theirs is a job critical to the success of America’s war on terrorism. Operational security in wartime prohibits relating details of VR-48 missions, but the *Capitol Skyliners* and their aircraft have been directly involved in supporting Operation Enduring Freedom.

Pilots in the Naval Air Reserve perform many more drills than their fellow Naval Reservists in a normal year. Most Selected Reservists are required to complete 48 drills per year, including pilots, who must also drill 72 additional flight training periods. Add to that the extra active duty training they normally contribute, and it is not hard to see why these pilots log about 2,500 hours of support annually and are some of the best fliers in the world. ✈

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provide high-speed, long-range (more than 4,000 miles or 10 hours), short-notice, logistical support all over the

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Above, AD2 Van Louvier inspects City of Annapolis before takeoff. Right, AM2 Frank Otero, right, and AD2 Jamaison Moore check over City of Baltimore.

