

VAQ-141 SHADOWHAWKS:  
“READY ON ARRIVAL”

By Ltjg. Tom McGowan



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When the *Shadowhawks* of Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 141 departed NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., in April 2001 en route to Norfolk, Va., and *Enterprise* (CVN 65) for a Mediterranean/Arabian Gulf deployment, they expected a typical cruise. They could not have known how eventful the deployment would become.

The *Shadowhawks* got their first glimpse of Europe as the *Big E* passed through the Straights of Gibraltar on 8 May, followed by a port visit in Spain. *Enterprise* and Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8 went on to conduct joint exercises with the French navy, which allowed the crew to observe the newest French aircraft carrier *Charles De Gaulle* in action, as well as her air wing flying E-2C *Hawkeyes*, *Super Etendards* and the newest naval fighter, the *Rafale*.

After routine operations in the western Mediterranean and a port visit in Italy, *Enterprise* headed for the North Atlantic and British Isles in June. Later on the coast of Scotland, the squadron spent two weeks training with NATO allies in the Joint Maritime Course. Operations were intense and included spectacular low-level flights through northern Scotland and integrated attacks against the RAF Stornoway and RAF Lossiemouth airfields. A port call in Portugal and two rigorous weeks at sea off Greece preceded a stint in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf, where the *Enterprise* battle group supported Operation Southern Watch, enforcing the no-fly zone over Iraq.

On the morning of 10 September, the *Big E* began the long transit home. But the expectation of a leisurely journey back to the United States was shattered on 11 September as the *Shadowhawks* and the world watched the despicable terrorist acts unfold in the skies over New York City and Washington, D.C. Soon after, *Enterprise* and CVW-8 joined other U.S.



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Opposite, a trio of VAQ-141 EA-6B *Prowlers* fly over snow-capped mountains in April 2001. Left, a *Shadowhawks* electronic countermeasures officer prepares for flight. Below, the flight deck “shooter” aboard *Enterprise* (CVN 65) gives the launch signal to catapult a *Prowler* of VAQ-141 in October 2001. The *Shadowhawks* conducted strikes against terrorist training camps and Taliban military installations in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom.



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Navy assets on station in the northern Arabian Sea and brought the fight to the enemy. Providing a large portion of the firepower unleashed during the initial strikes into Afghanistan, *Enterprise* and her battle group lived up to their motto, “Ready on Arrival.” During Operation Enduring Freedom, the aircrews of VAQ-141 provided the crucial element of electronic attack in support of coalition air and ground forces.

Since their return to NAS Whidbey Island, the *Shadowhawks* continue to train in order to maintain a high level of proficiency in preparation for whatever challenges the next deployment brings. ✈

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