

CVWR-20 FIREPOWER IN RESERVE



By Ted Carlson

Today, our nation is engaged in Third World conflicts, and our military forces are stretched thin as we are busier than ever abroad. Couple the operational tempo with the 1990's downsizing, and the end result is long days and hard work for Naval Aviation personnel. Reserve aviation forces, such as Reserve Carrier Air Wing (CVWR) 20, stand ready to help meet the challenges.

CVWR-20 is headquartered at NAS Atlanta, Ga., and commanded by Captain Stan O'Connor and deputy commander Capt. Clay Fearnow. The air wing reports to Commander Naval Air Force Reserve, New Orleans, La. CVWR-20 units include Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 209, NAF Washington, D.C.; Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 77, NAS Atlanta, Ga.; VAW-78, Norfolk, Va.; Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 201, NAS JRB Fort Worth, Texas; VFA-203, NAS Atlanta; VFA-204, NAS JRB New Orleans; Fighter Squadron Composite (VFC) 12, NAS Oceana, Va.; and VFC-13, NAS Fallon, Nev. Should the air wing be mobilized, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 142 at Atlanta and Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron (HS) 75, NAS Jacksonville, Fla., become components of CVWR-20.

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A VFA-204 F/A-18A-plus Hornet flown by LCdr. Oscar Evans rolls in to drop a duo of MK 84 2,000-pound bombs on the El Centro range in California.

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The VAQ-209 *Starwarriors* deployed to Incirlik, Turkey, in 2002, flying combat missions in support of Operation Northern Watch. Left, a squadron EA-6B *Prowler* sporting a “9-11” graphic taxis out for a mission. Below, a pilot and NFO prepare for a Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses sortie. Right, CVWR-20 commander Capt. Stan O’Connor strides across the ramp after a flight in a VFA-204 *Hornet*.

PR2 Nixon

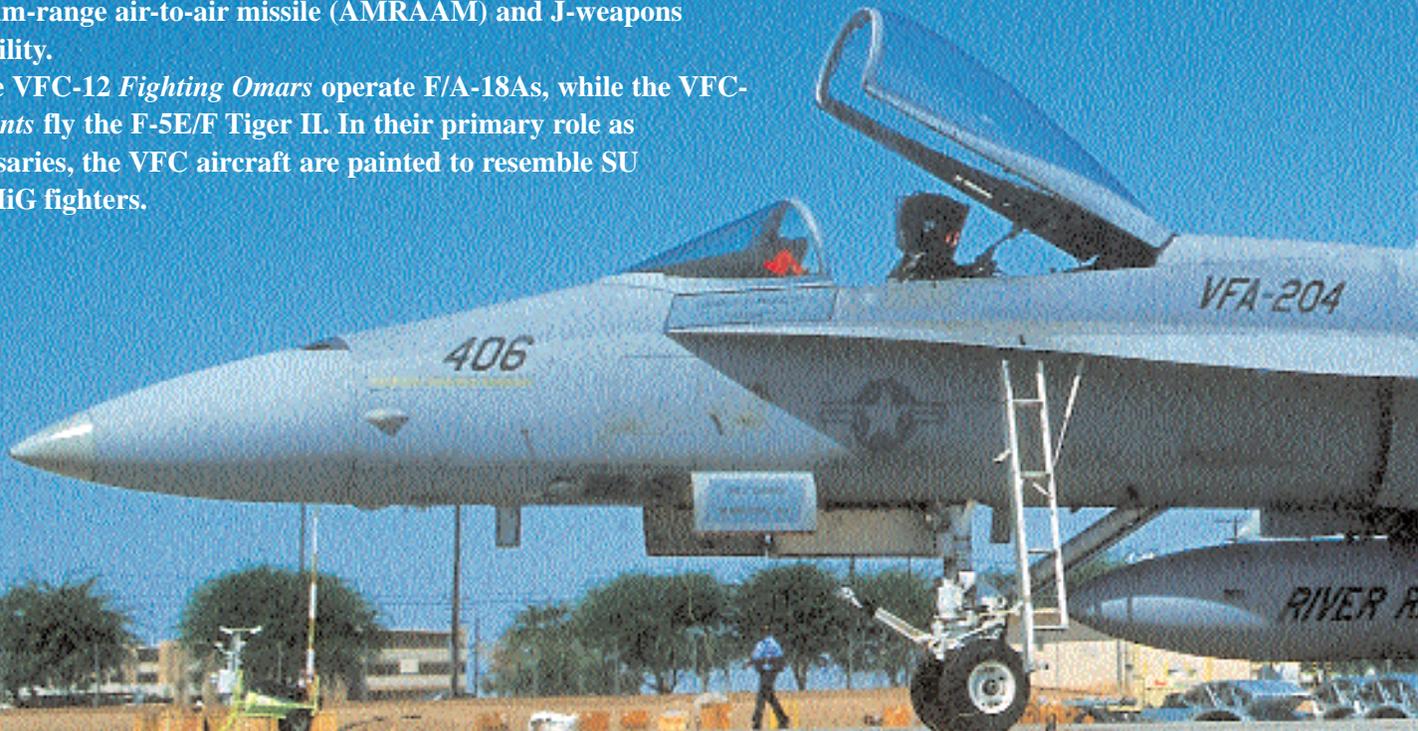
PR2 Nixon

The VAQ-209 *Star Warriors* operate the EA-6B *Prowler* and often deploy in support of expeditionary forces. The VAW-77 *Night Wolves* fly specially modified Group 0 E-2C *Hawkeys* in the counternarcotics role in the Caribbean, while the VAW-78 *Fighting Escargots* use the aircraft type in the traditional carrier-based role.

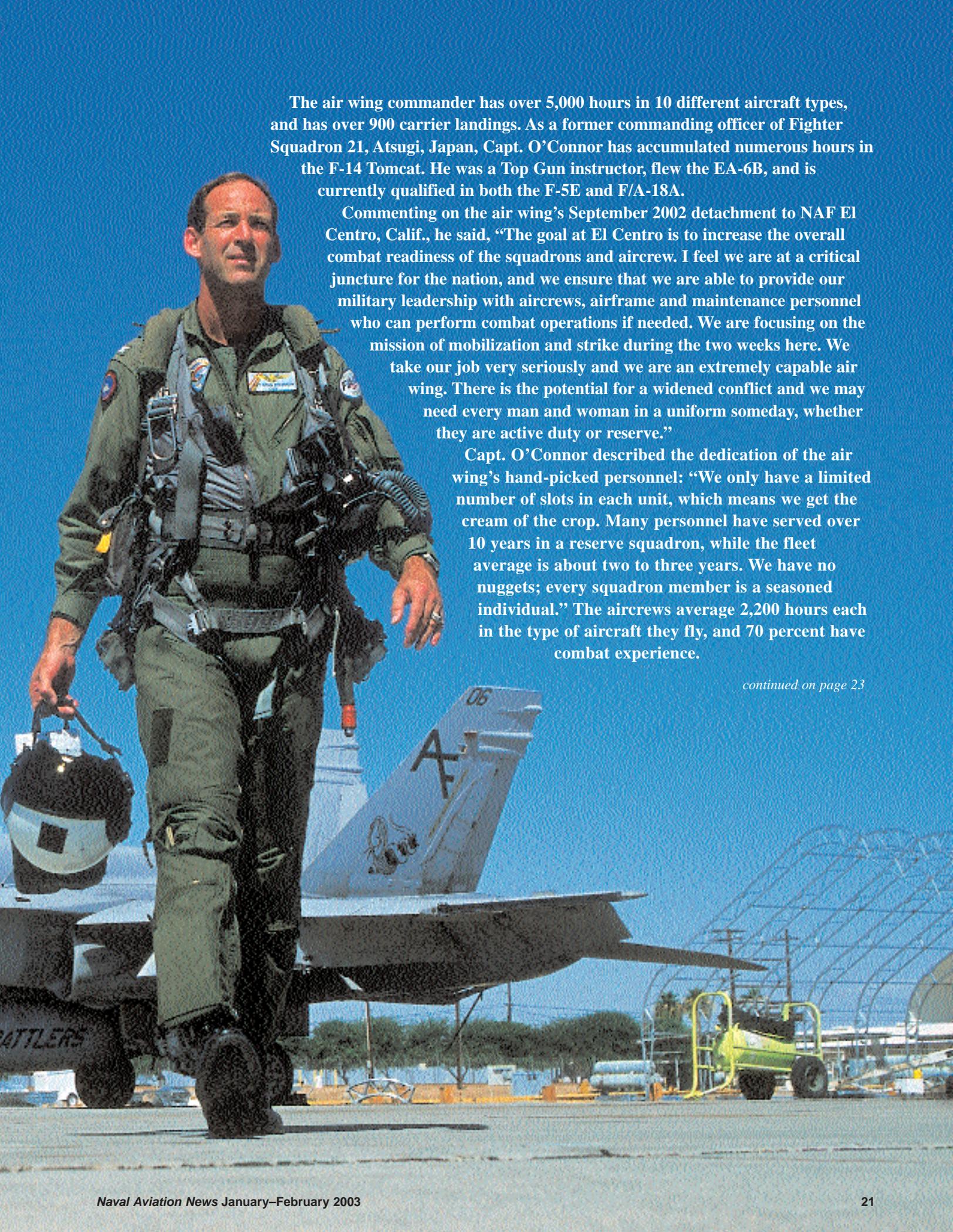


The VFA-201 *Hunters’* F/A-18A *Hornets* wear a camouflage paint scheme for the adversary role. Both the VFA-203 *Blue Dolphins* and VFA-204 *River Rattlers* fly the F/A-18A-plus variant with advanced medium-range air-to-air missile (AMRAAM) and J-weapons capability.

The VFC-12 *Fighting Omars* operate F/A-18As, while the VFC-13 *Saints* fly the F-5E/F *Tiger II*. In their primary role as adversaries, the VFC aircraft are painted to resemble SU and MiG fighters.



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The air wing commander has over 5,000 hours in 10 different aircraft types, and has over 900 carrier landings. As a former commanding officer of Fighter Squadron 21, Atsugi, Japan, Capt. O'Connor has accumulated numerous hours in the F-14 Tomcat. He was a Top Gun instructor, flew the EA-6B, and is currently qualified in both the F-5E and F/A-18A.

Commenting on the air wing's September 2002 detachment to NAF El Centro, Calif., he said, "The goal at El Centro is to increase the overall combat readiness of the squadrons and aircrew. I feel we are at a critical juncture for the nation, and we ensure that we are able to provide our military leadership with aircrews, airframe and maintenance personnel who can perform combat operations if needed. We are focusing on the mission of mobilization and strike during the two weeks here. We take our job very seriously and we are an extremely capable air wing. There is the potential for a widened conflict and we may need every man and woman in a uniform someday, whether they are active duty or reserve."

Capt. O'Connor described the dedication of the air wing's hand-picked personnel: "We only have a limited number of slots in each unit, which means we get the cream of the crop. Many personnel have served over 10 years in a reserve squadron, while the fleet average is about two to three years. We have no nuggets; every squadron member is a seasoned individual." The aircrews average 2,200 hours each in the type of aircraft they fly, and 70 percent have combat experience.

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Above, Lt. Rob Molina, a VAW-78 Naval Flight Officer, vectors F/A-18 Hornets to their targets from the darkened "tube" of his E-2C Hawkeye. Left, pilots LCdr. Rob Koon, left, and CO Cdr. W. J. Adelman perform a steep turn in their E-2C. Right, LCdr. Rob McGregor of VFA-201 releases 4,000 pounds of iron from his F/A-18A on the EI Centro range.

In October 2002 almost 100 Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 201 reservists were mobilized to support Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8 scheduled to deploy aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) in 2003 in the war against terrorism. The reserve squadron replaces active squadron VFA-22, which in turn is replacing active F-14 Tomcat squadron VF-102 in CVW-9. VF-102 is transitioning to the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet.

VAW-78 skipper Commander Jay Adelman has flown E-2s his entire career, including tours in VAWs 117, 110, 88 and 77. When asked about the El Centro det, he said, "The Naval Air Reserve is no longer a one-weekend-a-month, two-weeks-a-year flying club. As a product of the drawdowns and with the increase in commitments, we are called upon to perform a lot of fleet support. This is in addition to our normal air wing mobilization training, which we are doing here in El Centro.

"Every year we do 30 days of counternarcotics work, provide search-and-rescue [SAR] support for space shuttle launches, and after 9-11 we boarded *Nimitz* [CVN 68] with other units to provide force protection for the carrier when it went from Norfolk, Va., around the tip of South America to its new home at North Island, Calif.," Adelman continued. "It was unprecedented for reservists to be that long at sea, 54 days, without being mobilized.

"E-2s used to primarily perform the airborne early warning mission, but now we are more involved with combat air patrol, strike and SAR support. We put the fighters on the bogeys and direct the jets to targets performing command and control." In October 2003, the squadron begins transitioning from its Group 0 E-2Cs to Group 2 Hawkeyes, which have a navigation upgrade with integrated global positioning system (GPS) and updated T56-GE-427 5,100-horsepower engines. Cdr. Adelman explained that "this will give us the same capability and features that most fleet Hawkeyes have today. Our aging Hawkeyes are still a viable support asset to the Navy. If called upon, this squadron is ready to go, and we would succeed."

The CO of VFA-204 is Cdr. Tom Egbert, a selected reservist who has 3,500 hours in military aircraft, mostly in F/A-18s, and he flew F-15C Eagles as an exchange pilot with the Air Force. He commented, "We have





The engines of an E-2C Hawkeye from VAW-78 turn up prior to taxiing at NAF El Centro, Calif., as squadron ground crew members prepare the aircraft for launch. Facing page, led by a VAW-78 E-2C Hawkeye, a trio of Hornets from VFAs 204, 203 and 201 and an F-5 Tiger II from VFC-13 fly over rugged mountains near the California/Arizona border.

13 F/A-18A-plus Lot VIII Hornets on hand, and with the ‘plus’ upgrade, the mission computer capability was enhanced. This allows us to employ weapons such as the joint direct attack munition, joint stand-off weapon and AMRAAM, and it gave us a GPS that aids the inertial navigation system.

“We have two missions, mobilization and fleet support flying as adversaries,” the VFA-204 skipper explained. “At El Centro, we’ve taken off our adversary hats and are practicing as any fleet air wing in preparation for mobilization. We have a great opportunity to drop live ordnance plus integrate with the other air wing assets.”

Cdr. Egbert concluded, “I enjoy working with the troops. We have an awesome maintenance department and a great admin department, but it is really a team effort and we do our best when we go on the road. We step up to the plate and our people work very hard. It is fulfilling to be associated with each squadron member, whether they are pilots, maintainers, staff or hold other positions. Here at El Centro we are operating as a cohesive unit

and it is all about teamwork.”

The Naval Air Reserve is not just an adjunct to the naval structure, but a vital part of it. CVWR-20 provides a viable, visible and dynamic complement to regular units. The reserve air wing’s contributions are essential to the success of Naval Aviation’s mission.

Ted Carlson is a professional aviation photographer. He extends special thanks to Rear Admiral Dan Kloeppe; Capts. Stan O’Connor and Clay Fearnow; Cdrs. Jay Adelman, Joe Breedlove, Kevin Dye, Tom Egbert, Peter Hayes, Chuck Mingonet and Mike Wellington; Lieutenant Commanders Oscar Evans, Scott Hana, Trey Higgins, Scott Laedlein, David Lowe, Rob McGregor, Bill Rieke and Rob Turner; Senior Chief Guy Carlton; and the many others who helped.

CVWR-20 Mobilization Units

Code	Modex	Type	Unit	Nickname
AF	1XX	F/A-18A	VFA-201	Hunters
AF	3XX	F/A-18A	VFA-203	Blue Dolphins
AF	4XX	F/A-18A	VFA-204	River Rattlers
AF	60X	E-2C	VAW-78	Fighting Escargots
NW	61X	SH-60F/HH-60H	HS-75	Emerald Knights
AF	62X	EA-6B	VAQ-209	Star Warriors

Land-based CVWR-20 Units

Code	Modex	Type	Unit	Nickname
AF	XX	F/A-18A/B	VFC-12	Fighting Omars
AF	XX	F-5E/F	VFC-13	Saints

