

THE BUCKEYE STOPS HERE

Story and Photos by Mike Wilson

For more than two decades, most Navy and Marine Corps aviators got their first jet flight and jet carrier qualification in the North American T-2C Buckeye. After its delivery to Training Squadron (VT) 9, NAS Meridian, Miss., on 30 April 1969, the Naval Air Training Command used the T-2C for basic jet

training. However, there has been a continual reduction in Buckeyes since 1992 when T-45 Goshawks arrived in VTs 21 and 22 to carry on the jet training mission.

The T-2 has an analog cockpit, while the newer T-45's cockpit is digital. But perhaps the most notable difference between the two aircraft

is that the T-2 requires a special bridle instead of a launch bar to be catapulted from the flight deck. The Buckeye is the last aircraft in the Navy with this requirement.

A final page in the T-2's history was turned on 15 July 2003 at 1700 when CVN 75 air boss Commander Robert P. Wylly announced over the loud speaker, "On board USS *Harry S. Truman*, on

the flight deck, the Buckeye stops here!" With that announcement, four VT-9 T-2Cs flew over the ship, signaling the beginning of carrier qualifications for student pilots. These future Naval Aviators were the last to carrier qualify in the Buckeye. VT-9 will continue flying the T-2C until summer 2004, and VT-86 at NAS Pensacola, Fla., still uses the aircraft as naval flight officer trainers.

Because the T-2 lacks nose wheel steering, flight deck personnel have to get physical with the airplane for the catapult shot.

"It's fun to fly and I'd buy the airplane if the Navy would sell one."

—LCdr. Will Oliver, VT-9



VT-9 brought 15 aircraft and 8 students aboard *Truman* for this event. By week's end, all of the students had flown their required 10 traps and 4 touch-and-goes to earn their wings of gold. The last T-2C trap was made by Lieutenant Barry Bassel at 2030 on 17 July, and the last cat shot was flown by Lieutenant Commander Vince Walters and Lieutenant John Brooks at 1200 on 18 July.

One of the Buckeyes, side number 948, is the same plane once used by *Truman's* commanding officer, Captain Michael Groothousen, when he made his first carrier landing as a student pilot in March 1976. "It really surprised me that an airframe we were slamming into the deck 27 years ago still had life in it," he said, then added, "I'm a

little sad. It was a great airplane, but we need to move on with technology."

After the skipper's plane left the flight deck for the last time, the ship's motto was temporarily changed, if only for a day, to "The Buckeye stops here."

Mike Wilson is a professional photographer specializing in Naval Aviation. JO1(SW) Joseph Gunder of the *Harry S. Truman* Public Affairs office also contributed to this article. Special thanks to LCdr. Will Oliver of VT-9 for his assistance.

"The airplane is like an old pair of your favorite shoes. You don't want to get rid of them just because they're old. They feel very comfortable."

—Cdr. Mike Horsefield, VT-9 XO

Below, a T-2 Buckeye coming in for a landing and a T-45 Goshawk parked on the deck aboard *Harry S. Truman* depict the past and the future of Naval Aviation training. Background and right, a Buckeye in the groove and catching a wire on board *Truman* marks the students' progression toward the coveted wings of gold. Facing page, *Truman* CO Capt. Michael Groothousen stands with the T-2C (BuNo 158591) that he flew as a student 27 years ago.

