

VR-57 CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF FLEET LOGISTICS SUPPORT



By LCDrs. Chris Weller and Scott Needle

A the Unified Combatant Commander headquarters in Qatar, a time-critical requirement is issued for vital equipment and supplies for coalition forces engaged in Iraq. As the support infrastructure musters the necessary gear, a short-fused tasking message is issued to the Navy's fleet logistics support community to provide the airlift function for the equipment. Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VR) 57 receives the tasking and within 24 hours launches a C-9B Skytrain II to answer the call,

flying from its base in San Diego, Calif., to the operational theater without delay. The lift requirements satisfied and the equipment delivered, our forces in the field are able to continue pressing forward.

For VR-57 and the Navy's 13 other VR squadrons, this type of rapid-response service to the fleet is business as usual. The mission is the airborne delivery of personnel, equipment and supplies, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in peacetime and war.

In peacetime, most Sailors and Marines have flown to and from workups or deployments aboard the C-9B. For 25 years, the

Conquistadors of VR-57 have maintained and flown the Skytrain II in support of Navy Air Logistics Office and Joint Operational Support Airlift Command missions, serving the entire Department of Defense (DOD). Staffed solely by Naval Reserve personnel,

Above, a VR-57 C-9B flies over Coronado, Calif. A variant of the commercial DC-9, the C-9B's interior can be configured in a variety of ways to meet specific airlift missions.

VR-57 was established at NAS North Island, Calif., in November 1977. Formal establishment ceremonies were held in April 1978 with the delivery of its first C-9B aircraft. This year, past and

present *Conquistadors* reunited in San Diego to celebrate the accomplishments of a squadron that has flown over 125,000 Class A mishap-free flight hours in support of global operations for a quarter century.

PHC(AW/NAC) Edward G. Martens

On 17 December 1935, Douglas Aircraft Company rolled out the legendary DC-3 prototype. In 1941, the Navy version, the R4D, later designated C-47, was named Skytrain. In February 1965, Douglas built the first of its most widely used twin-engine jet airline transports, the DC-9. In 1973, the Navy variant was designated the C-9B Skytrain II. Today, the aircraft carries on the reliability and longevity of the famed DC-3 of WW II.

VR-57 currently operates four C-9Bs that have been modified from the civilian airline DC-9-30 series with auxiliary fuel tanks, a port side cargo door, and special navigation and long-range communications equipment to facilitate global missions. The ability to change the interior configurations of the C-9B to meet specific airlift missions has provided profound flexibility to support passenger and cargo mission requirements for the Navy and DOD. Currently, there are 21 C-9s among 5 squadrons under operational control of Commander Fleet Logistics Support Wing (CFLSW), located at NAS JRB Fort Worth, Texas. CFLSW Skytrain IIs—along with C-130 Hercules, C-20D/G Gulfstream IIs and IVs, C-37 Gulfstream Vs and C-40 Clippers—comprise the largest air wing in the Navy and provide 100 percent of the Navy's shore-based, fixed-wing airlift capability.

In the past year, VR-57 has flown over 25,000 passengers and carried 1.5 million pounds of cargo to destinations including Europe, Asia, Africa, the South Pacific and Australia in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, as well as fulfilling the standard

Right, VR-57's *City of San Diego* shines in the southern California sky. Below, left to right, pilots LCdrs. Greg Kashouty and Cathy Jendrysik and crew chief AT2 Chris Altizer pose in front of the aircraft, which has been flying with VR-57 since April 1978.



Photos by PHC(AW/NAC) Edward G. Martens



operational needs of the fleet. During the past 25 years, the personnel who operate and maintain the C-9B for VR-57 have served in direct support of nearly every Navy and Marine Corps operation throughout the world. This fact is more impressive considering the majority of VR-57's personnel are Selected Reservists serving the Navy on a part-time basis.

VR-57 skipper Commander Rey Consunji has flown nearly 4,000 hours in H-46 Sea Knights, UC-12B Hurons, C-130Ts, C-20Ds and C-9Bs. For Consunji, a full-time support Naval Reserve officer, the Selected Reserve personnel in VR-57 give the fleet substantial bang for the buck.

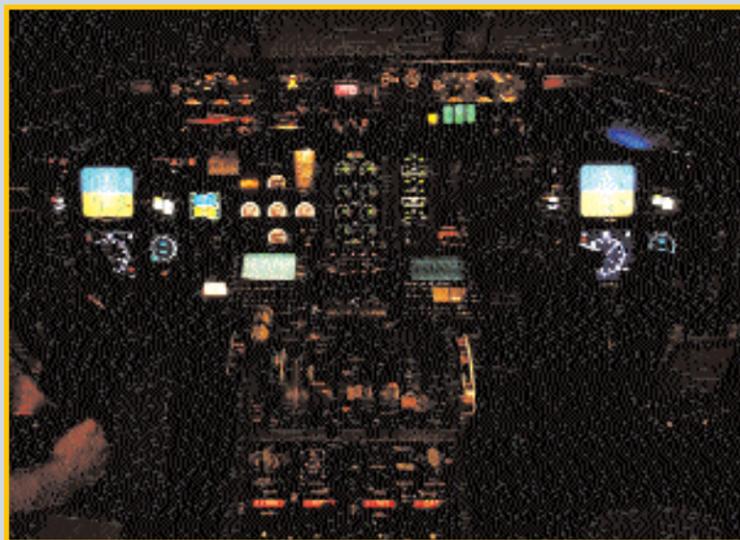
"We are a 24/7, 365-day operation that is staffed mainly with Selected Reservists, comprising over 70 percent of our officers and 60 percent of the enlisted personnel. The remainder of the squadron is full-time Naval Reserve staff. When the flag goes up for VR-57, we deliver. That speaks

volumes of the dedicated active duty reservists and the Selected Reservists, who are without a doubt the backbone of Naval Reserve squadrons."

During the buildup to and throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, VR-57 C-9s were deployed to various remote locations in direct support of Central Command and European Command taskings. Rotating aircraft and using selective mobilization of reservists from VR-57 to the detachment sites provided optimal use of Selected Reserve personnel and ensured increased aircraft availability. The selective mobilization of critically needed personnel proved to be a huge success. VR-57 was able to safely complete dozens of direct-support missions, totaling 425 flight hours and resulting in the movement of 953 passengers and 300,500 pounds of cargo in March 2003 alone. VR-57 C-9s and other CFLSW aircraft provided unprecedented levels of logistical airlift support to forward-deployed coalition forces, satisfying time-critical



Ted Carlson



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Above, Selected Reservist LCdr. J. P. Ayubi maneuvers the C-9B during an approach into San Clemente Island. Left, the C-9B's avionics modification II upgrade provides the ability to operate in reduced vertical separation minimum airspace.

taskings with minimal mobilization time or training needed.

In November Cdr. Consunji relinquished command to Cdr. Joe Cook, formerly an S-3 Viking pilot who became a Selected Reserve officer and a pilot in VR-57 more than a decade ago. An American Airlines MD-80 pilot, he has 4,000 military flight hours and 5,500 hours combined DC-9 and MD-80 time.

"We are a short-fuse task unit," Cdr. Cook said. "Our mission is to satisfy immediate logistics requirements for

the unified commanders. The Navy has first priority on these airplanes, but we do not work exclusively for them—we support everyone. Our crews have operated in the Mediterranean, western Pacific, South America, around the Horn of Africa, Australia and the former Soviet Union—almost anywhere. We deliver people and parts where they need to be when they need to be there. I am proud of the response we received from our personnel after 9/11, as well as the day-to-day efforts of all our people, most of whom have careers beyond the Navy. The synergy of our Selected Reservists and full-time staff are what truly make the squadron," he emphasized.

Recent avionics upgrades have allowed many of the CFLSW C-9s to operate in the new international reduced vertical separation minimum standards that are currently in place in 41 European and African countries. This AVI MOD-II upgrade allows the C-9B to continue to effectively operate overseas in support of the fleet while still satisfying international aviation regulations.



PHC(AW/SW) Scott D. Sagisi

Above, PHC(AW/NAC) Edward Martens of Fleet Combat Camera Group, Pacific photographs a VR-57 C-9B from the ramp of a C-2 Greyhound.

Despite these improvements, there is the undeniable reality that the C-9B's life expectancy is coming to an end. Senior VR-57 pilot and maintenance officer LCdr. Hobie Anderson said, "The safety record of the C-9 fleet-wide is remarkable. It is a great plane and fun to fly. Although the C-9 has proven to be a valuable airframe in the Navy's inventory, its age is starting to show. The maintenance man-hours saved and the overall efficiency gained by transitioning to the C-40 is self-evident."

Cdr. Consunji added, "The jets are about 30 years old. It is amazing to see young airmen fix a jet older than they are! Nonetheless, the age of the aircraft and engines present increasing challenges with weight, capacity and distance, and in certain environments and theaters we are performance limited. When we deploy we support the fleet directly, and because of the importance of our mission, we expect to get the new C-40. We are excited about the new airplane and the next 25 years to follow."

The C-40A Clipper is the next-generation high-speed logistics transport aircraft. On 29 August 1997, the Navy awarded the Boeing Corporation the contract for the 737-700C to begin the replacement of the C-9Bs. VR-59 in Fort Worth, Texas, was the first squadron to receive the C-40A, followed by VR-58 in Jacksonville, Fla. In

summer 2004, groundbreaking is scheduled for a new hangar designed for the Clipper next to VR-57's current hangar. With many budgetary variables still unresolved, VR-57 could stand down its four C-9Bs to begin flying the C-40A as early as the middle of 2005. The Clipper will vastly improve upon the C-9B's performance and thus improve the VR community's continued support to the fleet.

The *Conquistadors* of VR-57 have proudly flown the C-9 for 25 years and look forward to a future with the C-40A. Cdr. Cook believes the future of the VR community is bright, "The C-40 will outperform our C-9s and enhance our capabilities significantly. Couple the C-40 with the C-130 and the C-20D/G and our airlift capabilities will be better than they ever have been. That bodes well for VR, but the real victory is substantially increased service to the Navy, Marine Corps and Department of Defense."

Having faithfully served VR-57 for a quarter century, the C-9B Skytrain II will quietly retire with a stellar safety record and an even more remarkable history of unparalleled service to the nation. ✈

LCdrs. Weller and Needle are full-time staff C-9B pilots with VR-57. Special thanks to Fleet Combat Camera Group, Pacific and Ted Carlson for their skilled photo support.