



PH2 Michael B. W. Watkins

Prowler Revamp

The Naval Air Systems Command removed some EA-6B Prowlers from service to address structural fatigue damage. The number of fleet Prowlers will be reduced from 95 to 71 until spring to allow repairs and maintenance on high-fatigue aircraft, many of which will be inducted into depot-level maintenance for wing replacement. Above, a VAQ-128 Prowler flies on a training exercise over Puget Sound in Washington.

H-1 Development Continues

On 9 October 2003, a UH-1 "Huey" made the first flight of a fully configured and functional H-1 upgrade aircraft at NAS Patuxent River, Md. The flight followed completion of a major modification period that incorporated a movable elevator and the Thales "Top Owl" helmet-mounted sight and display. The H-1 upgrade program was approved for low-rate initial

production, allowing Bell to remanufacture six UH-1N "Hueys" and three AH-1W Super Cobras into UH-1Ys and AH-1Zs, respectively, in FY 04.

KC-130J Begins OPEVAL

Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 1 and Marines from MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., began an operational test and evaluation

period for the KC-130J Hercules in October 2003. The testing—which includes aerial refueling and rapid ground refueling of aircraft; aerial delivery of equipment and Marines; low-level operations; and temporary landing zone operations—will explore the Hercules' performance in a variety of climatic conditions both with and without night-vision goggles.

VMX-22 Activated

On 28 August 2003, Marine Tiltrotor Test and Evaluation Squadron 22 was activated during a ceremony at MCAS New River, N.C. VMX-22 is tasked with the operational testing and evaluation of the MV-22 Osprey and future tiltrotor-related systems.

USCG Heli Named



The Coast Guard's newest helicopter, the MH-68A, above, has been officially named the Sting Ray. The all-weather, short-range, armed interdiction helicopter employs state-of-the-art navigation, communication and avionics equipment for maritime drug interdiction and homeland security missions. The Sting Ray is flown by Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron Jacksonville, Fla.

MARINE HELOS GET MORE FIREPOWER

CH-53 Super Stallions of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461 have been equipped with a ramp-mounted weapon system (RMWS) to provide a 180-degree, rear-suppressive fire capability. The ramp system comprises a Fabrique Nationale M3M .50-caliber machine gun modified to Marine specifications. A soft mount reduces recoil and increases first-round burst accuracy, and a 300-round ammunition box allows a single Marine to reload the weapon. The RMWS is being evaluated as a possible defensive weapon system for other assault support aircraft. Sgt. Ron Strzalkowski, above, and Sgt. Richard Dorsett, left, demonstrate its capabilities.



Matthew B. Roberson



Cpl. Eric C. Ely

VF-154 TRANSITIONS TO VFA

Fighter Squadron 154 relocated from NAF Atsugi, Japan, to NAS Lemoore, Calif., in September 2003. Following transition to the F/A-18F Super Hornet and redesignation as Strike Fighter Squadron 154, the *Black Knights* will become part of Carrier Air Wing 9 and embark aboard *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70). Left, a VF-154 pilot takes a final look back as he prepares to launch from Atsugi for the last time in a squadron F-14 Tomcat.



PH3 John E. Woods



PH1 Jon Gesch

An F/A-18F Super Hornet of Strike Fighter Squadron 102 lands at NAF Atsugi, Japan, in November 2003, marking the squadron's new assignment to Carrier Air Wing 5. The *Diamondbacks* are the first Super Hornet squadron to be permanently forward deployed outside the United States.

Breathing Device Mimics Hypoxia

The Naval Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory completed testing of its reduced oxygen breathing device (ROBD). The device comprises a standard aviation mask and a software program that adds nitrogen to room air. This allows aviators to learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of hypoxia without being subjected to an actual change in altitude in a pressure chamber.

Multimission Maritime Aircraft Update

The Multimission Maritime Aircraft (MMA) concept is one step

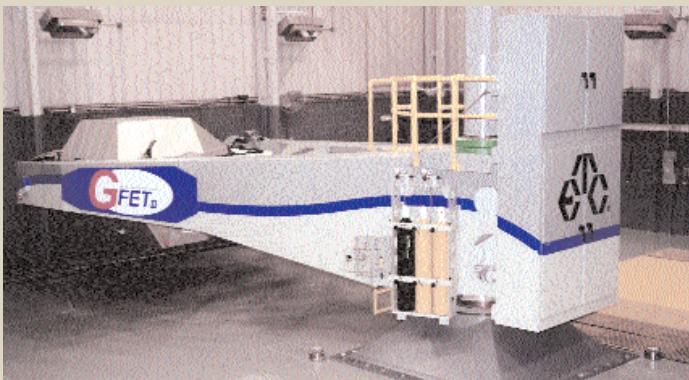
When the VAW-126 *Seahawks* returned from a Med cruise last year, it marked the end of 30 years of naval service for the E-2C Group Zero Hawkeye. The squadron flew over 445 hours and 100 sorties in Operation Iraqi Freedom. VAW-126 is transitioning to the E-2C Group II/ Navigation Upgrade aircraft.



closer to completion with the release of a request for proposal on 28 October 2003. The Naval Air Systems Command document provides administrative guidelines for the competitors in the MMA program. The Navy is evaluating

Boeing's 737 Military Derivative and Lockheed Martin's Orion 21 for the MMA platform, which will replace the Navy's fleet of P-3C Orions. Final source selection is expected in fall 2004.

NEW SIMULATOR



Environmental Tactronics Corporation has developed new military aircraft technology to improve the way fighter pilots fly, train and combat enemy targets. The Authentic Tactical Flight Simulator accurately recreates the sustained high-G forces and motion of tactical fighter jets, providing pilots with a realistic and physically accurate experience of maneuvering a fighter aircraft under hostile conditions. At one-twentieth of the cost of training pilots in actual test flights, it has the potential to save the U.S. government and taxpayers billions of dollars annually, without aircraft mishap risks or wear on high-cost tactical equipment.



BUCKET BRIGADE

Below, UH-3H Sea Kings of HC-85 prepare for certification in aerial firefighting to help combat wildfires in southern California. Right, a squadron UH-3H loads its "Bambi" bucket at Lake Miramar, Calif., during certification flights. The bucket holds 324 gallons of water weighing 3,000 pounds. Photos by PH1 Michael D. Kennedy.



The Navy recommended to Department of Defense officials that *Carl Vinson*'s (CVN 70) refueling and complex overhaul begin in fall 2005, one year later than originally planned.

Mishaps

On 22 October 2003, a UH-1N "Huey" of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367 was destroyed, but the crew members survived the crash at Twentynine Palms, Calif.

Two F/A-18A Hornets of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off South Carolina on 15 October 2003. The aircraft were lost, but the pilots were recovered safely.

For the Record

The Navy has named its newest amphibious assault ship *Makin Island*, honoring the Marine Corps raid on Japanese-held Makin Island in the Gilbert Islands in August 1942.

On 29 August 2003, Acting Secretary of the Navy Hansford T. Johnson signed the donation contract officially transferring the historic aircraft carrier *Midway* (CV 41) to the San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum in San Diego, Calif.