

VC-8 REDTAILS DEACTIVATED

By LCdr. Rick Burgess, USN (Ret.)



Fleet Composite Squadron (VC) 8, the Navy's last operator of the A-4 Skyhawk jet, was deactivated in ceremonies held 23 August 2003 (officially 30 September) at NAS Oceana, Va., after 45 years of service. Cdr. Thomas McDonough was the last CO of the *Redtails*.

VC-8 was the last Navy squadron based at Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, P.R., and ceased operations there in early 2003 after the closure of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility on the island of Vieques. The *Redtails*, who most recently operated TA-4J Skyhawks and UH-3H Sea King utility helicopters, provided services to fleet units training in the area. The closure of Vieques in March 2003 eliminated the need to maintain VC-8 in service.



Left, VC-8 CO Cdr. Thomas J. McDonough receives a presentation from the Command Master Chief as the last Navy Skyhawk squadron is retired. Above, a pair of VC-8 TA-4Js depart the Sun and Fun Airshow in Lakeland, Fla., in April 2003.

PH2 Anthony M. Koch



Richard Vander Meulen

VC-8 traced its origins to Guided Missile Service Squadron 2, established at NAS Chincoteague, Va., on 1 July 1958. The squadron moved to Roosevelt Roads in 1959 and on 1 July 1960 was redesignated Utility Squadron (VU) 8, which became VC-8 on 1 July 1965. Its mission of providing target services to the fleet required it to operate a wide variety of

aircraft, and soon the squadron was flying one of the most diverse inventories of aircraft in the Navy.

During its first decade, VC-8 operated KDA, Q2C and BQM-34 Firebee drones; QF-9F/Gs (fighters converted to drones); DB-26J, DF-1D, DF-8A/F, DF-9F, DT-28B, DT-33B, DP-2E/H and US-2C aircraft for drone control and target towing;



Above, a VC-8 P-2 Neptune heads toward the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range to launch Firebee drones into remote-controlled target presentations. Facing page: top, VC-8's flight line at NS Roosevelt Roads, P.R.; bottom, a VU-8 HUS-1A helicopter (later UH-34E) recovers a Firebee drone following missile-firing operations.

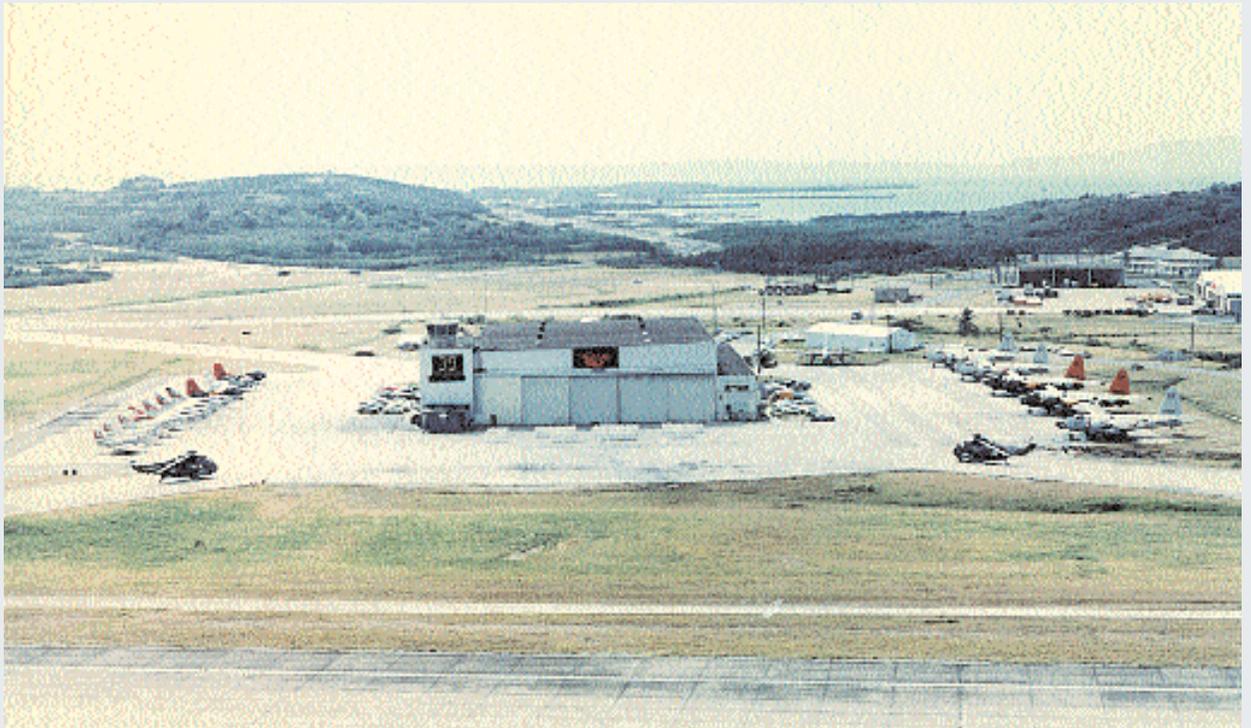
and UH-34E/G and SH-34G Seahorse helicopters for target and torpedo retrieval, rescue and utility roles.

During the 1970s, the squadron's stable of aircraft changed to A-4C and TA-4J Skyhawks and SH-3A/G and RH-3A Sea King helicopters, while retaining DP-2E/H and EP-2H Neptunes, which were used for

a variety of special projects as well as launching Firebee drones.

During the 1980s, dissimilar air combat maneuvering training became a more prominent role for VC-8 and its TA-4Js. The squadron's SH-3Gs were replaced by SH-3Hs, which became UH-3Hs during the late 1990s.

continued on page 20





Mike Wilson

Above, these Skyhawks sport two different paint schemes used in their role as adversaries. Right, VC-8 ops officer LCdr. Mike Eberhardt autographs the last TA-4J delivered to the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center in Arizona. Facing page, pilot LCdr. Eberhardt, right, with backseater Lt. Chris Castanon, flew the last TA-4J to the “boneyard” in April 2003.

In addition to outstanding training and support provided to the fleet, crews operating the squadron’s helicopters are credited with saving more than 140 lives since 1970, as well as providing humanitarian relief for areas stricken by hurricanes and volcanoes. ✈

Rick Burgess is Managing Editor of the Navy League’s *Sea Power* magazine.

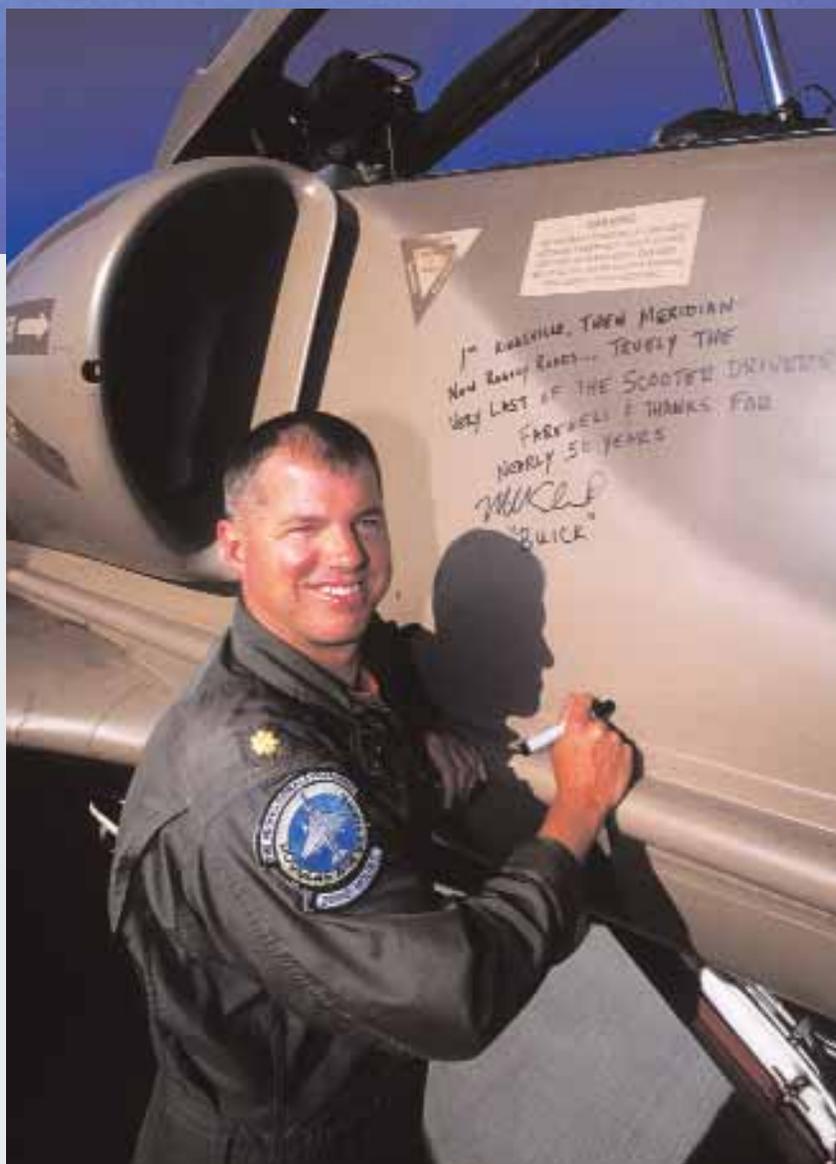


Photo above and facing page by Richard Vander Meulen

