



THE YEAR IN REVIEW 2003



By Curtis A. Utz and Mark L. Evans

Naval Aviation faced tremendous challenges during 2003, not only on the battlefield but throughout the force as it evolved to meet increased operational demands and improve the use of technological advances. Combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and high operational requirements at other locations worldwide, demonstrated the importance of Naval Aviation to the nation's defense. The organization and structure of traditional naval forces changed to meet these challenges, as did the methods of deploying forces. The Navy also continued to develop and integrate new

technology, ships and aircraft into the fleet.

The conflict in Iraq resulted in the largest deployment of combatant Naval Aviation forces since Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In October 2002, Iraq's failure to comply with United Nations resolutions led Congress to authorize President George W. Bush to use the military to enforce Iraqi compliance. Saddam Hussein's regime continued to disregard warnings to eliminate its offensive arsenal, and on 17 March 2003 the president issued an ultimatum demanding that Hussein and his sons leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to

President George W. Bush photo by PH3 Tyler J. Clements



PH3 Philip A. McDaniel

do so precipitated Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Five carrier battle groups, three amphibious ready groups and two amphibious task forces, totaling more than 200 coalition ships, deployed for OIF. Some 780 Navy and Marine Corps aircraft flew 13,893 sorties. *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72), *Constellation* (CV 64) and *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63) steamed in the Arabian Gulf, while *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75) and *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) operated in the Mediterranean. Changes were made in the structure of some of these forces. To provide continual close air support for Marines ashore, the amphibious assault ships *Bataan* (LHD 5) and *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6) became “Harrier carriers” by replacing all of the helicopters, except two MH-60Ss for search and rescue and support, with 24 AV-8B Harrier IIs. Conversely, *Saipan* (LHA 2) carried 42 helicopters, a combination of AH-1W Super Cobras, UH-1N “Hueys” and CH-46E Sea Knights, the largest number of helos on any assault ship in the Arabian Gulf.

Naval Aviation forces operating over and near Iraq faced daunting tasks. Operational tempo led to many

Facing page: top, during his visit on board *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72) in May 2003, President George W. Bush gives a thumbs-up before an aircraft launches; bottom, a VFA-115 F/A-18 Hornet sported this crest and the names of the fallen New York City firefighters on 9-11-01. Above, a VFA-113 pilot signals his plane captain that he’s ready to launch from *Abraham Lincoln* during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

ships averaging 15-hour fly days in conditions that were often harsh. In the Arabian Gulf, hot windstorms from the north whipped fine powdery sand across the decks and into the aircraft. Strike planners had to “deconflict” the routes of numerous aircraft and Tomahawk land attack missiles arcing over the congested ships offshore to

avoid potential fratricide. There was also the threat posed by the enemy. Although the Iraqi air force had limited capabilities, Iraqi air defenses included a vast array of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and upward of 6,000 antiaircraft guns. Planners divided Iraqi air defenses into missile engagement zones (MEZ), and pilots nicknamed the heavily defended capital area “Baghdad Super MEZ.” Despite changes in Iraqi engagement procedures caused by the known effectiveness of EA-6Bs, the Prowlers destroyed or negated the enemy electronic warfare and radar capabilities so thoroughly that not a single Iraqi radar successfully locked on and guided SAMs to coalition aircraft during the entire campaign. This increased the success of numerous missions, most of which were close air support or force interdiction.



Naval Aviation carried out these strike missions on a highly dynamic battlefield. The opportunity to make time-sensitive strikes often meant that airborne or ground-based controllers would assign or reassign new targets during a single mission. In the confusion of battle, pilots did not always receive updated information about the enemy and controllers were unavailable, so the pilots had to visually search their assigned areas, find and identify targets, and attack the enemy in the rapidly changing environment. Throughout OIF, air power ripped apart Iraqi defenses, forcing enemy troops out of their positions and into the open. Once so exposed, air power prevented them from retreating fast enough to escape the coalition advance on the ground.

Naval aircraft also executed a variety of other missions. S-3Bs conducted surface surveillance and sea control flights to protect vital carriers and amphibious vessels. The Vikings also performed mission tanking, passing fuel to strike aircraft around the clock. Aircraft cleared mines from Iraqi waterways, enabling the delivery of both military and humanitarian supplies. Naval Aviation also provided

F/A-18F Super Hornets from the Black Aces of VFA-41, assigned to CVW-11 aboard *Nimitz* (CVN 68), conduct in-flight refueling exercises over Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

situational awareness and intelligence to coalition commanders and evacuated casualties from the battlefield.

OIF also prompted the use of new weapons and Navy aircraft in new roles. An F-14D, which had been modified afloat, executed the first Joint Direct Attack Munition strike from a Tomcat. The conflict also saw the first use of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet in combat refueling, and the EA-6B Prowler in psychological operations roles. An S-3B Viking was used for the first time to carry out an overland strike.

Naval Aviation continued to be involved in active operations beyond Iraq. Operation Enduring Freedom continued with naval aircraft operating in Afghanistan and participating in maritime interception operations in the Fifth Fleet area of responsibility. Naval Aviation also remained active in counterdrug operations in the

Atlantic and the Pacific.

Naval Aviation underwent organizational and mission changes during the year. The Chief of Naval Operations directed that the terms carrier battle group (CVBG) and amphibious ready group (ARG) be replaced with the terms carrier strike group (CSG) and expeditionary strike group (ESG), respectively, to reflect the enhanced striking power of more widely distributed forces. During OIF operations, the Navy began transitioning to the CSG concept. The first ESG, consisting of an ARG augmented with surface combatants and an attack submarine, deployed in September. The Navy continued the transition of F-14 Tomcat fighter squadrons to F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter squadrons, and initiated organizational changes in the patrol community. Major changes occurred in the afloat elements of Naval Aviation with the decommissioning of *Constellation* (CV 64) and commissioning of *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76). The “Sea Swap” program led to changes in the way smaller vessels would be deployed and manned, including their aviation elements.

Technological developments and

upgrades also continued during the year. Unmanned aerial vehicle programs moved forward in both the Navy and the Coast Guard. The MV-22 Osprey program resumed shipboard testing and the Marine Corps established an Osprey test and evaluation squadron. Work continued on the F/A-18's electronic warfare version, the EA-18G, slated to replace the EA-6B Prowler. Naval Aviation also made strides in the development and acquisition of a variety of sensors, cockpit systems, radars and ordnance.

Naval Aviation performed well in 2003, continuing to find ways to become a more responsive and effective force despite the demands of increased combat operations.

The following chronology highlights other significant events during 2003.

January

MV-22 Osprey number 10 completed shipboard tests with *Iwo Jima* (LHD 7) off the Maryland

coast, the first since the MV-22 program's return to flight on 29 May 2002.

1 Maj. Joseph J. Foss, 87, USMCR (Ret.), died in Arizona. Appointed as an aviation cadet in 1940, he earned his wings and commission as a second lieutenant on 31 March 1941. Foss shot down 26 Japanese aircraft while serving in the South Pacific in VMF-121 from September 1942 to April 1943. For his actions, he received the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Flying Cross. He later had a noteworthy career in the Air National Guard, politics and business. In February 2003, an airfield constructed in Kuwait during OIF was named MCAS Joe Foss in his honor.

1 The merger of the aviation storekeeper (AK) and storekeeper (SK) ratings into storekeeper (SK) became effective for enlisted paygrades E1 to E6, with E7 and above eligible for the exams over succeeding months.

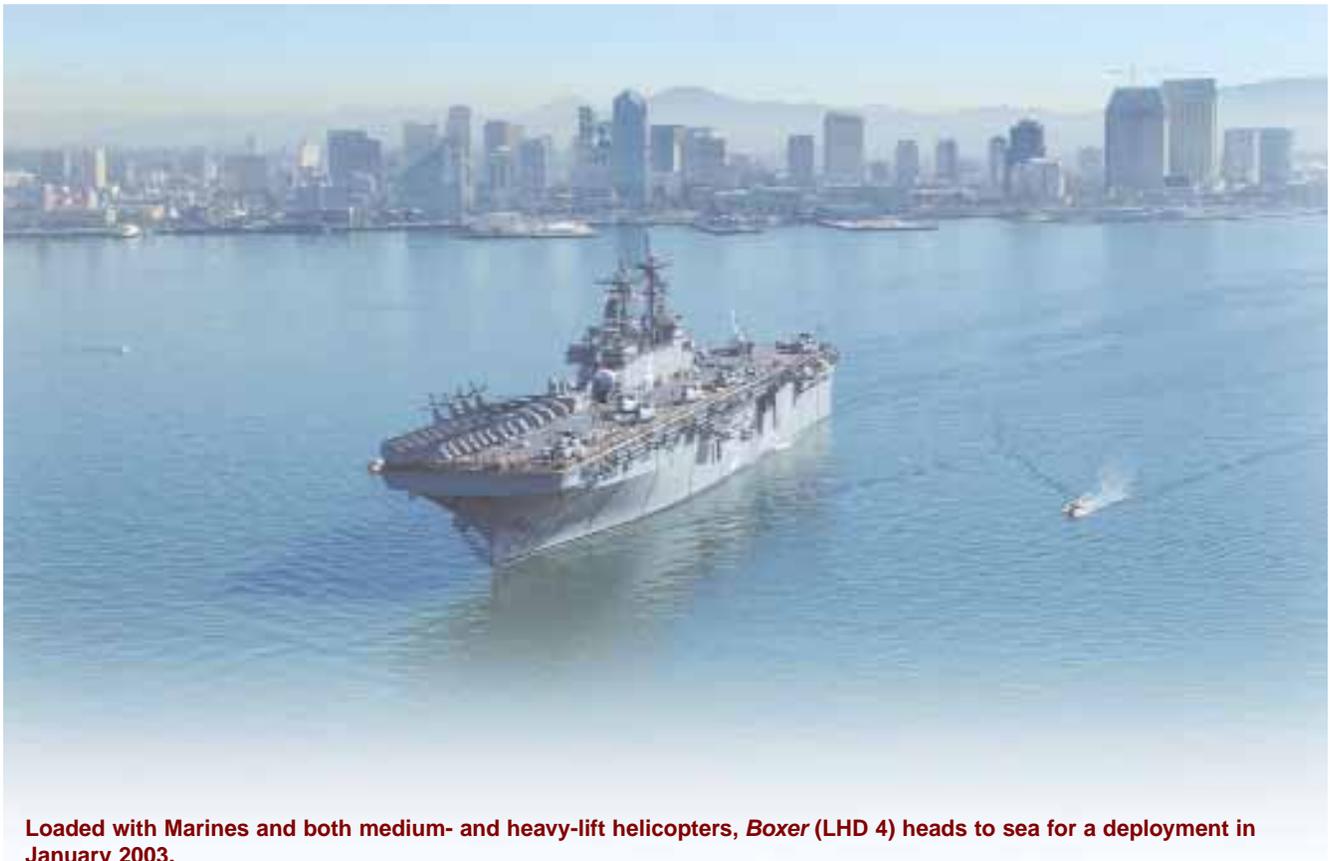
10 Secretary of the Navy Gordon

R. England signed the letter of certification to Congress confirming that, as planned, the Navy and Marine Corps would cease training on the Vieques Inner Range, P.R., on 1 May. The fleet had trained on the island since 1941, but after Marine aircraft accidentally dropped two 500-pound bombs on an observation tower on 19 April 1999, killing one person and injuring four others, protesters demanded an end to the exercises.

10 Gen. James L. Jones, 32nd Commandant of the Marine Corps, was designated Honorary Naval Aviator No. 25, during a ceremony in the Chief of Naval Operations' office.

14 To support ongoing operational requirements, the Marine Corps announced its largest Stop Loss and Stop Move initiative since President George H. W. Bush first delegated stop-loss authority to the Secretary of Defense during Operation Desert Shield in 1990. The decision affected nearly 16,000

PH3 Gregory Badger



Loaded with Marines and both medium- and heavy-lift helicopters, *Boxer* (LHD 4) heads to sea for a deployment in January 2003.

PATROL SQUADRON MAJOR DEPLOYMENTS, 2003

NAS Keflavik, Iceland/NS Roosevelt Roads, PR/Hato AB, Curacao, Netherlands Antilles*

VP-26 Aug 02–Feb 03
 VP-5 Feb 03–Aug 03
 VP-10 Aug 03–Feb 04

NAF Misawa, Japan (Det in Kadena)

VP-9 Dec 02–May 03
 VP-4 Jun 03–Dec 03
 VP-1 Dec 03–present

NAS Sigonella, Italy

VP-16 Aug 02–Feb 03
 VP-8 Feb 03–Aug 03
 VP-45 Aug 03–Feb 04

*On 15 July 2003, Navy maritime patrol aircraft ended scheduled flight operations at Roosevelt Roads and shifted operations to Hato Air Base in Curacao, Netherlands Antilles. In February 2004, Navy maritime patrol aircraft ended scheduled flight operations at Keflavik and also shifted operations to Hato Air Base.

Indian Ocean (Dets in Arabian Gulf/Northern Arabian Sea)

VP-46 Dec 02–May 03
 VP-40 Jun 03–Nov 03
 VP-47 Nov 03–present



PHCS Mahlon K. Miller

Marines scheduled to be discharged between 15 January and 30 September. Discharges were postponed and 6,500 moves scheduled in the next 90 days were frozen.

23 The Secretary of the Navy selected the names of the next three *Arleigh Burke* (DDG 51)-class destroyers, two named in honor of Naval Aviators. *Halsey* (DDG 97), the second ship to bear the name, honors FAdm. William F. Halsey, Jr. (1882–1959). Awarded the Navy Cross during WW I for his actions on Atlantic convoy duty, he became a Naval Aviator in 1935 at the age of 52. Early in WW II he led a task force built around the carrier

A VP-4 P-3C Orion takes off from NAS North Island, Calif., to participate in exercises with the *Nimitz* (CVN 68) carrier strike group.

Enterprise (CV 6) during raids against the Japanese, and then commanded the forces in the South Pacific. Halsey led the Third Fleet during the Leyte Gulf and Okinawa campaigns later in the war. *Forrest Sherman* (DDG 98), the second ship to bear the name, honors Adm. Forrest P. Sherman (1896–1951), who commanded aviation squadrons between the world wars before going on to command *Wasp* (CV 7) in 1942. Staff appointments followed through the remainder of WW II, earning him the

Distinguished Service Medal for his role in planning the capture of Japanese-held islands. Adm. Sherman also served as Chief of Naval Operations after the war.

26 HSL-37 Det 2 and *Fletcher* (DD 992) participated in the first “Sea Swap” experiment at Perth, Australia, when, following their relief by HSL-45 Det 6, part of the detachment and its helos returned to Hawaii in an Air Force C-5 Galaxy. The Sea Swap program is intended to keep ships deployed in forward areas by swapping their crews and air detachments.

28 An SH-60 Seahawk from HSL-48 Det 2, embarked on board the frigate *John L. Hall* (FFG 32),



JO1 Joseph Krupel

coordinated with maritime patrol aircraft and the Coast Guard cutter *Diligence* (WMEC 616) to intercept a 40-foot go-fast vessel in the Caribbean. Although the go-fast's crew of four scuttled the boat upon capture, the combined Navy-Coast Guard team recovered 4,265 pounds of cocaine with an estimated value of \$130 million.

30 HC-5 Det 6, permanently forward deployed to Japan on board *Essex* (LHA 2), completed the Navy's first deployment of the MH-60S Seahawk aboard an amphibious assault ship. The deployment began on the 16th.

30 Raytheon Co., Portsmouth, R.I., was awarded a contract for the demonstration and development of the Airborne Mine Neutralization System planned for integration into the MH-60 to identify and neutralize previously detected and classified sea mines.

31 Honeywell International, Inc., Defense Avionics Systems,

1st Battalion, 2d Marines personnel board CH-53E Super Stallions as part of the Amphibious Task Force East transit to their next base in the Central Command area of operations.

Albuquerque, N.M., was awarded a contract valued at almost \$14 million for full-rate production of 155 advanced multipurpose color display units for F/A-18C/D Hornets and AV-8B Harrier IIs.

February

1 The space shuttle *Columbia*, orbiter OV-102, mission STS-107, broke apart at an altitude of about 203,000 feet over north central Texas during descent into Kennedy Space Center, Fla. Among the seven crew members lost were Naval Aviation personnel Cdr. William C. McCool, 41, pilot; and mission specialists Capt. David M. Brown, 46, and Cdr. (Capt.-select) Laurel B.

Clark, 41. STS-107 launched from Kennedy on 16 January, conducting over 90 medical, biological and physical science experiments.

1 A Coast Guard MH-68A Stingray conducted a 14-mile chase of a 40-foot go-fast vessel in the eastern Pacific. When the smugglers failed to comply with repeated orders to stop, the Stingray disabled the boat's engine with gunfire. The Coast Guard cutter *Diligence* (WMEC 616) recovered over 4,200 pounds of cocaine, and an estimated 1,800 additional pounds were dumped overboard by the smugglers.

4 The last E-6A Mercury, side number 409, BuNo 164409, departed Tinker AFB, Okla., to undergo modifications to become an E-6B, which will enable it to communicate with strategic defense forces.

4 NATO decided that allied commercial and civilian naval vessels transiting the Straits of

Gibraltar would receive enhanced force protection through the vulnerable choke point, authorizing a protective umbrella of aircraft over ships sailing through the straits.

8 Bell Helicopter, a subsidiary of Textron, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, received a contract to commence concept and preliminary design for the first phase of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) portion of the Coast Guard's Integrated Deepwater System Program. Three of the company's Eagle Eye UAVs were selected for testing in 2005. If requirements are met, the Coast Guard plans to add 69 to its inventory, with total interoperability with the Navy.

10 A Coast Guard HH-65A Dolphin from CGAS Detroit, Mich., rescued a total of 17 people from Lake Erie. In two separate incidents, victims were trapped on ice floes that had separated from the mainland during a snow squall near Marblehead, Ohio.

12 Boeing Co., St. Louis, Mo., received a \$20.5 million contract for the second phase of the component advanced development of the Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft.

12 The Marines began their first operational assessment of the AH-1Z Super Cobra and UH-1Y "Huey" upgrades, concluding on 27 March.

20 Lockheed Martin Aeronautics, Marietta, Ga., received a \$20.5 million contract for the component advanced development of the Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft.

24 The Department of Defense awarded Boeing Co., St. Louis, Mo., an \$81.2 million contract to produce more than 300 Joint Helmet-Mounted Cueing Systems to be utilized by both the Air Force and the Navy, including the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet. On 29 August the company received a \$24 million contract for 100 more systems.

25 During a change of watch ceremony, the Coast Guard transferred from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Homeland Security.

March

The Navy approved the Shared Reconnaissance Pod (SHARP) for entry into the next phase of low-rate initial production. Intended as a replacement for the F-14 Tactical Air Reconnaissance Pod System, it

was designed for around-the-clock operations with day standoff ranges. SHARP was to be introduced to the fleet on the F/A-18F Super Hornet.

An RQ-8A Fire Scout vertical takeoff and landing tactical unmanned aerial vehicle completed its first flight fully operated from the Marine Corps S-788, a humvee-mounted ground control station at Webster Field Annex, NAS Patuxent River, Md.

1 The first F-14D Tomcat equipped with the Joint Direct Attack Munition deployed. A team from the Naval Air Systems Command had modified all forward-deployed Tomcats in February.

12 President George W. Bush signed Executive Order 13289, authorizing the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary and the Global War on Terrorism Service medals. Eligibility for each was initially determined by service in operations combating terrorism between 11 September 2001 and a terminal date to be determined by the Secretary of Defense. On 26



PH2 Daniel J. McLain

Facing page, a VFA-151 F/A-18C Hornet launches from *Constellation* (CV 64). Right, an F/A-18 pilot of VFA-113 enters Iraqi airspace during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Below, a Hornet from VFA-201 prepares to launch from *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) to conduct combat missions in support of OIF.



PHIAN Brad Garner

February 2004, the Department of Defense announced final approval for the medals, along with the award criteria.

13 The crew of an HSL-51 SH-60B Seahawk deployed with the frigate *Gary* (FFG 51) assisted in the rescue of all eight Iraqi fishermen from the dhow *Kaptain Muhamadat*, when she lost steerage and propulsion in heavy seas, capsizing 20 miles south of the Iranian coast in international waters.

14 Raytheon Missile Systems, Tucson, Ariz., was awarded an \$80.8 million contract for 337 full-rate

production AGM-154A Joint Standoff Weapons, 313 for the Navy and 24 for the Air Force.

19 VAQ-131 provided suppression of enemy air defenses for Air Force aircraft conducting a short-notice strike against Iraqi leadership targets.

19–21 Beginning at 0800 (all times local unless otherwise noted) on the 19th, special operations forces secured Iraqi oil rigs off the Al Faw peninsula before they could be set afire by their garrisons. During the confusion of a nighttime battle for some rigs on the 21st, a

P-3C Orion from VP-46 teamed with an AC-130H Spectre from the Air Force's 4th Special Operations Squadron to sink an Iraqi patrol boat with precision-guided ordnance as the latter attempted to infiltrate past them. Throughout these operations, Seahawks from HS-2 and HSLs 47 and 48 provided sniper cover, downlinking forward-looking infrared video to ships for pre-assault surveillance of targets. By midnight on the 19th, the port of Umm Qasr was declared secured, enabling operations to begin to clear waterways for the delivery of

humanitarian relief supplies.

21 At 2100, coalition air forces began large-scale air strikes against Iraq involving about 700 strike aircraft. While coordinating the entire suppression of enemy air defenses near Baghdad, two VAQ-131 EA-6B Prowlers maneuvered for more than 30 minutes while avoiding numerous anti-aircraft bursts. These two planes, along with eight other Prowlers, completely defeated the extensive array of electronic sensors across the entire frequency spectrum. At 2135, a pair of VFA-113 F/A-18C Hornets neutralized Iraqi surface-to-air missiles (SAM) at Al-Taqqedam airfield in the heart of the heavily defended Baghdad Missile Engagement Zone with a salvo of AGM-88 High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles (HARM), enabling the other strike aircraft to pulverize their targets. The combination of jamming and HARMs meant that no Iraqi SAMs were able to lock on or guide on coalition aircraft.

22 A 20-plane strike from

Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) blasted Iraqi command and control and infrastructure targets, including one of Saddam Hussein's palace complexes and one of the primary Iraqi AM broadcasting stations.

22 Despite intense fire from numerous Iraqi anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles, VFA-113 led a strike that destroyed the Iraqi Baa'th Party headquarters, comprising 12 critical targets in four different cities, using Joint Direct Attack Munitions.

23 During harsh weather, VMFA-323 launched an evening strike from *Constellation* (CV 64) against Special Republican Guard barracks and presidential security buildings near Saddam International Airport. The four F/A-18C Hornets each hit their targets with three 2,000-pound Joint Direct Attack Munitions during

Below, USS Bataan (LHD 5), one of two "Harrier Carriers" in OIF I, conducts flight operations in the Arabian Gulf.

a short break in the weather, directly contributing to the later capture of the airport and the advance on Baghdad.

24 CVW-3 aircraft struck SA-2 and Roland surface-to-air missiles in the Kirkuk area with AGM-88 High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles.

25 Two VFA-151 F/A-18C Hornets and a VS-38 S-3B Viking destroyed Saddam Hussein's presidential yacht *Al Mansur*, an *Osa I*-class missile boat and training ship on the Tigris River near Al Basrah. The aircraft accomplished their mission after receiving a short-order tasking for the time-sensitive strike. A Hornet laser-designated the target, while the crew of the S-3 hit the target with an AGM-65E Maverick air-to-surface missile—marking the first time a Viking executed a combat overland strike.

25 The Medina Iraqi Republican Guard Armored Division took advantage of fierce weather to launch a determined attack against the U.S. Army V Corps. Despite visibility reduced to 0/0 and the

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