

VS-21 Redtails Deactivated

By LCdr. Rick Burgess, USN (Ret.)

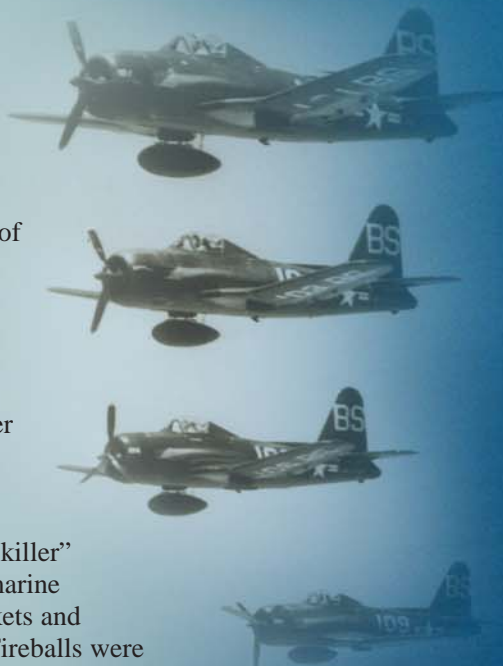
Sea Control Squadron (VS) 21 was deactivated at NAF Atsugi, Japan, on 31 January 2005. Ceremonies held on 4 November 2004 marked the passing of the squadron after almost 60 years of active service. Cdr. David A. Mayo was the last CO of the Redtails.

VS-21 is unusual in that it began its existence as an air group. Carrier Escort Air Group 41 (CVEG-41), established at NAS Sand Point, Wash., on 26 March 1945, included Fighter Squadron (VF) 41 and Torpedo Squadron 41, flying FR-1 Fireball and TBM-3E Avenger aircraft, respectively. On 15 November 1946, CVEG-41 was redesignated CVEG-1, when its two squadrons were redesignated Fighter Squadron 1E and Attack Squadron (VA) 1E.

CVEG-1 was one of three air groups assigned to conduct “hunter-killer” antisubmarine warfare (ASW) operations. Under the concept, a submarine detected by a TBM’s radar would be attacked by a Fireball with rockets and guns, and then finished off by the Avengers. In mid-1947, VF-1E’s Fireballs were replaced by F6F-5N Hellcats.

CVEG-1 was redesignated Fleet Composite Squadron 21 (VC-21) on 1 September 1948, absorbing VF-1E and VA-1E. VC-21, now equipped with TBM-3S/3W Avengers, moved to NAS San Diego, Calif., but operated for training from *Badoeng*

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Facing page, top, VF-1E Fireballs fly in formation in 1947. This squadron was part of the air group that later became Fleet Composite Squadron 21. Bottom, Air Antisubmarine Squadron 21 S2F-1 Trackers fly in formation over Japan during a deployment on *Princeton* (CVS 37) in 1956. This page, Ted Carlson captured a Sea Control Squadron 21 S-3 Viking operating off Japan in October 2004.



Strait (CVE 116).

VC-21 was redesignated Air Antisubmarine Squadron (VS) 21 on 23 April 1950. After the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950, VS-21 embarked on *Sicily* (CVE 118) and was staged ashore in Japan. Its TBMs flew medevac missions to Yonpo during the 1st Marine Division's withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir area. The squadron also conducted ASW patrols from *Bairoko* (CVE 115) in the Sea of Japan.

VS-21 returned to San Diego in early 1951 and upgraded to the AF-2S/2W Guardian and deployed twice to the western Pacific on board *Cape Esperance* (CVE 88). The squadron retired its last TBMs in 1952. In August 1952, VS-21 deployed on board *Valley Forge* (CV 45) to evaluate the carrier as an ASW platform, an experiment which led to the redesignation of several

Essex-class carriers as antisubmarine carriers (CVSs). VS-21 made two more WESTPAC deployments with the Guardian, operating variously from *Cape Esperance*, *Bairoko*, *Bataan* (CVL 29), and *Point Cruz* (CVE 119), as well as NAS Agana, Guam.

In December 1954, VS-21 made the transition to the new twin-engine S2F-1 (S-2A) Tracker ASW aircraft. Pioneering tactics for the new aircraft, VS-21 deployed to WESTPAC on *Princeton* (CVS 37) in January 1956. During the remainder of the 1950s, VS-21 also deployed on *Philippine Sea* (CVS 47) and *Kearsarge* (CVS 33). In 1959, VS-21's inventory of S2F-1S1 (S-2F) versions, which featured improved sensors, was augmented with several S2F-2 (S-2C) versions, which featured a weapons bay large enough to carry a nuclear depth bomb.

In 1960, as part as a Navy-wide reorganization of



Left, an Air Antisubmarine Squadron 21 S-3 Viking demonstrates its utility in the antisubmarine warfare role in 1985. Below right, VS-21 XO Cdr. Paul Foster receives a warm welcome as the squadron returns to NAF Atsugi in September 2004 following Exercise Summer Pulse, the squadron's final at-sea period before deactivating.

carrier ASW units, VS-29 was created using assets from VS-21. Both squadrons joined Carrier Antisubmarine Air Group 53 and deployed to WESTPAC on *Kearsarge*.

The Redtails later participated in the recovery of the Project Mercury space capsule *Sigma 7* and its astronaut, LCDr. Walter Schirra. On a third WESTPAC deployment on *Kearsarge*, VS-21 flew surveillance missions off Vietnam following the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident.

In 1965, VS-21 upgraded to the S-2E Tracker. The Redtails also became the Navy's only S-2 squadron to operationally deploy the AGM-12 Bullpup air-to-surface missile. The Redtails made three more deployments to the Vietnam War zone on *Kearsarge* by 1969, conducting antishipping missions and naval gunfire spotting.

In 1971, VS-21 embarked *Saratoga* (CV 60) for a short time to help evaluate the CV Concept, which involved combining ASW aircraft in an attack carrier air wing. In May 1972, the squadron made a short-notice deployment on *Ticonderoga* (CVS 14) to the Tonkin Gulf in response to the North Vietnamese spring offensive.

VS-21 was the first operational squadron chosen to operate the new S-3A Viking ASW jet. After training in the new aircraft in 1974, the squadron became the first to deploy with the S-3A, joining Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 1 on *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67) for a February 1975 Mediterranean deployment. The squadron transferred to CVW-9 in March 1976 and deployed to WESTPAC on *Constellation* (CV 64), followed by a transfer to CVW-15 and a June 1979 WESTPAC deployment on *Kitty Hawk*

(CV 63). Another transfer took the squadron to CVW-2 and a 1982 WESTPAC deployment on *Ranger* (CV 61), followed by another shift to CVW-11 and a May 1984 deployment to WESTPAC and the Indian Ocean on *Enterprise* (CVN 65).

Through 1990, VS-21 made four Indian Ocean deployments on board *Enterprise*. In 1988, the Redtails provided support for Operation Praying Mantis, the action against the Iranian navy following the mining that damaged the frigate *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG 58).

In April 1991, VS-21 became the first West Coast VS squadron to upgrade to the S-3B Viking, and in August joined CVW-5 permanently based at NAF Atsugi, Japan, and embarked on *Independence* (CV 62). The squadron also adopted aerial tanking as one of its missions. When *Independence* deployed to the Arabian Gulf in March 1992, VS-21 flew electronic surveillance and tanking missions over Iraq in support of Operation Southern Watch.

VS-21 was redesignated Sea Control Squadron 21 (also VS-21) on 15 September 1993 in recognition of the VS community's increased role in antisurface warfare. The squadron deployed to the Arabian Gulf in 1995 and off Taiwan in 1996. The Redtails shifted to *Kitty Hawk* in July 1998 when *Independence* prepared for decommissioning. In 1998 and again in 1999, the squadron deployed to the Arabian Gulf for Operation Southern Watch.

In March 2003, VS-21 deployed on *Kitty Hawk* for combat operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom. In less than four weeks, the squadron delivered more than 3 million pounds of fuel to CVW-5 strike aircraft. During the deployment, the squadron received the capability to launch AGM-65 Maverick missiles.

VS-21 spent its last at-sea period operating from *Kitty Hawk* as part of Exercise Summer Pulse '04, a surging of seven carriers under the new Fleet Response Plan. The squadron returned to Atsugi on 7 September 2004, and



JOSN Matthew Schwarz

was replaced in its tanking role by the F/A-18E/F Super Hornets of Strike Fighter Squadrons 27 and 102.