

Shadowhawks Establish Navy Prowler Presence in Iraq

By JO2 Stephen Murphy and PH2 Matthew Bash

During their current deployment with *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71), the Shadowhawks of Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8's Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 141 have overcome many challenges in establishing themselves as the first Navy Prowler squadron to set up operations at Al Asad Airbase, Iraq. The electronic warfare capabilities of the Shadowhawks' EA-6B Prowlers are enhancing the efforts of Marine Electronic Attack Squadron (VMAQ) 1 to provide aerial support for U.S. Marine Corps ground forces in Iraq.

The Shadowhawks were first called upon on 17 September 2005 to deploy for three weeks to Al Asad. Thirteen officers and 49 enlisted personnel departed *TR* while the ship was anchored for a port visit to Palma De Mallorca, Spain. The Shadowhawks quickly learned that they would have to overcome several challenges presented by their new temporary home. The work facilities had limited electrical access and were without telephone or computer hookups.

"We expected the conditions to be as we found them, and it didn't really matter to us [at the time] because we knew we would only be there for three weeks," said VAQ-141 Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Mark Curley.

With help from the Marines of VMAQ-1, who provided communications equipment and helped with maintenance needs, the Shadowhawks were able to get their Prowlers in the air. By mission's end, VAQ-141 had conducted 37 combat sorties, with a total of 165 hours of flight time.

Shortly after returning to *TR*, the Shadowhawks learned that what they thought would be a one-time experience was about to turn into a long-term presence. The decision was made to send VAQ-141 personnel back to Al Asad, this time for an indefinite period. The prospect of an indefinite land-based detachment meant that the Shadowhawks needed to find additional resources in order to be almost completely self-sufficient.



PH3 Randall Damm captured these images of the VAQ-141 Shadowhawks operating from Al Asad on 14 November 2005.

The need for a building from which to operate, the ability to communicate within Al Asad and back to *TR*, the need for vehicles, sleeping quarters, work spaces, offices and, more importantly, the capability to perform proper maintenance operations, became unexpected challenges for VAQ-141.

"It was almost like a homeport change because you are basically going to a base where they aren't quite set up to accommodate you," said AM1 Richard Peterson. "We had to actually build a presence there completely from scratch," Curley said. "We had to find these items, and in a war zone you aren't going to find this stuff just sitting around." Once again the Shadowhawks sought the support of VMAQ-1, but this time the crew was working to establish a solid and lasting presence not only for themselves, but also for the sake of any future Navy squadrons deploying to Al Asad.

The first step was to learn how to work within the Marine Corps supply system, and VMAQ-1 was there to assist. Once VAQ-141 personnel gained a better understanding of how the supply system worked, it became much easier to locate and receive needed supplies. "We developed a good working relationship with VMAQ-1," Curley said. "We were able to help each other out with parts and technical support if necessary."



The Shadowhawks found the answer to their communication needs when they made contact with Marine Air Group (MAG) 26. It was through MAG-26 that VAQ-141 was able to obtain UHF and VHF radios, and necessary telephone and computer hookups.

In only a few weeks, the Shadowhawks went from having an open-bay hangar with no shops and only a 12-by-10-foot operations space, to having seven well-lit and heated maintenance spaces with parts storage, an operations space with five office spaces, a ready room, and an established communications system.

“With all that we have learned, from the combat operations and tactics our aircrew and aircraft employ from Al Asad Airbase, to the logistics involved with

working, operating, and living in an expeditionary combat environment, we have built a set of standard operating procedures for any Navy VAQ squadron that deploys into Al Asad after we leave near the end of TR’s deployment,” said Curley.

“I couldn’t be more proud of all of the Shadowhawk Sailors,” said Cdr. Craig Clapperton, VAQ-141 XO. “This was a total team effort from our sailors in the detachment and our sailors on the carrier. Our sailors showed determination, persistence and a great deal of ingenuity. They built all of this from scratch, and they accomplished all of this while executing more than 500 flight hours and 100 combat sorties.” ✈

