



# VF-101 GRIM REAPERS DEACTIVATED

By LCdr. Rick Burgess, USN (Ret.)

A 15 September 2005 ceremony marked the deactivation (officially 30 September 2005) of Fighter Squadron (VF) 101 at NAS Oceana, Va., after 58 years of service. Cdr. Paul A. Haas was the last commanding officer of the Grim Reapers.

VF-101 was established on 1 May 1952 at NAS Cecil Field, Fla., carrying on the traditions of VF-10, a squadron with a distinguished WWII record that was disestablished in November 1945. The new squadron was initially equipped with the piston-engine FG-1D Corsair, but switched to the turbojet F2H-2 Banshee later that year. In June 1953, VF-101 deployed with Carrier Air Group (CVG) 1 on board *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVA 42) to the Mediterranean.

In December 1954, VF-101 deployed on *Midway* (CVA 41) around the world to the Formosa Strait and covered the Nationalist Chinese evacuation of the Tachen Islands with its F2H-2/2B jets. After its return to Cecil Field in July 1955, the squadron upgraded to the F4D-1



Skyray interceptor. As a unit of CVG-7, VF-101 briefly deployed on board *Saratoga* (CVA 60) to the North Atlantic in September 1957 for a NATO exercise. In April 1958, VF-101 absorbed Fleet All-Weather Training Unit Atlantic, and changed roles to become a replacement training squadron for the Skyray and the F3H-2 Demon fighter. Based at NAS Key West, Fla., the squadron also operated F3D-2T2 Skynights for radar training, as well as F9F-8T Cougar trainers and an R4D-5 Skytrain.

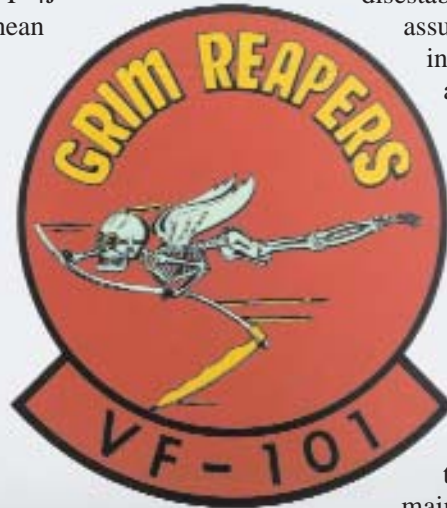
In June 1960, as a unit of Replacement Carrier Air Group 4, VF-101 established Detachment A at NAS Oceana, Va., for the purpose of training crews to fly and maintain the new F4H-1F (later F-4A and TF-4A) and F4H-1 (F-4B) Phantom II interceptor. The Skyray and Demon aircraft were transferred out by 1963. In February 1963 the squadron and the detachment were consolidated at NAS Key West, as VF-101 became the full-time Atlantic Fleet replacement training squadron for

Facing page, top, a VF-101 F-14D Tomcat conducts a flyby during a 2004 airshow. Photo by PH2 Daniel McLain. Facing page, inset, squadron pilots pose with a Corsair, the Grim Reapers' first aircraft, in 1952. Below, VF-101 began training pilots and maintainers in the F-4 Phantom II in 1960.

the Phantom II. The Grim Reapers conducted transition training for fighter squadrons switching to the F-4B.

In 1966, a detachment again was established at Oceana. Training in the F-4J version began in August 1967, and the old F-4As were retired in 1968. In April 1971, VF-101 shifted homeport to Oceana and maintained a detachment in Key West that flew A-4E and TA-4J Skyhawk aircraft as well as F-4Js. Because of a shortage of fleet fighter squadrons during the Vietnam War, VF-101 deployed an operational F-4J detachment, Det 66, to the Mediterranean with Carrier Air Wing 8 on board *America* (CVA 66) from July 1971 to December 1971.

VF-101 added the F-4N to its stable in 1975, and in January 1976 began training crews and maintenance personnel in the new F-14A Tomcat interceptor, while maintaining its training load for the Phantom II. However, the squadron was split on 5 August 1977 to create the new squadron VF-171, also based in Oceana, which assumed the fleet readiness squadron role for the Phantom II (including the detachment in Key West).



In April 1988, VF-101 added the F-14A+ (later F-14B) version to its flight line. In June 1989, the Grim Reapers again established an F-14A air combat maneuvering detachment in Key West. In 1990, when the F-14 assumed an air-to-ground strike role, VF-101 added strike training to its Tomcat syllabi, which eventually included training to operate the LANTIRN targeting pod. When VF-124, the West Coast F-14 fleet replacement squadron based at NAS Miramar, Calif., was

disestablished on 30 September 1994, VF-101 assumed the full load of F-14 training, including training in the F-14D version, and maintained a detachment at Miramar until September 1996. During the 1990s VF-101 acquired a few T-34C aircraft for target spotting.

As the F/A-18E and F/A-18F Super Hornet strike fighters entered service to replace the Tomcats, VF-101 began a slow drawdown. It retired its F-14As by September 2004 and its F-14Bs in early 2005 as the types were phased out of the fleet. In late 2004, the Grim Reapers trained their last students, and by mid-2005 maintained only two F-14D aircraft for air wing commander transition training. ✈

