

# VFA-82 MARAUDERS DEACTIVATED

By LCdr. Rick Burgess, USN (Ret.)

Strike Fighter Squadron 82 was deactivated at MCAS Beaufort, S.C., on 30 September 2005, after more than 38 years of active service. Cdr. Devon Jones was the last commanding officer of the Marauders.

VFA-82 was the first of three active strike fighter squadrons planned for deactivation under the Navy-Marine Corps Tactical Air Integration Plan, an initiative to pool Navy and Marine Corps carrier-capable squadrons in order to deploy them where best utilized.

The Marauders were originally established at NAS Cecil Field, Fla., on 1 May 1967 as Attack Squadron (VA) 82 to operate the new A-7A Corsair II attack aircraft. The new squadron joined Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 6 in December 1967, deploying in April 1968 to the Tonkin Gulf and flying combat missions over Vietnam from the deck of *America* (CVA 66.) The Marauders made a second deployment to the war zone in September 1969 with CVW-15 on board *Coral Sea* (CVA 43).

VA-82 traded its A-7As for early model A-7Es (later redesignated A-7Cs) in September 1970, and deployed to the Mediterranean in July 1971 with CVW-8 on board *America*. With action intensifying in Vietnam, the squadron deployed in June 1972 on *America* to the Tonkin Gulf and participated in Operations Linebacker I and II. The Marauders carried out a four-plane strike that finally put the infamous Thanh Hoa bridge out of commission. During its three deployments to the Tonkin Gulf, the Marauders lost four aircraft and three pilots to enemy action and four aircraft to mishaps.

After a 1974 deployment to the Mediterranean, VA-82 upgraded to the A-7E. With CVW-8 the Marauders

deployed on board *Nimitz* (CVN 68) to the Mediterranean in July 1976 and again in December 1977. While on a Med deployment that began in September 1979, *Nimitz* was ordered in January 1980 around the Cape of Good Hope to the Arabian Sea, compiling 144 consecutive days at sea. During this deployment the squadron also stood ready to support Operation Eagle Claw, the failed attempt to rescue U.S. Embassy personnel held hostage in revolutionary Iran.

Deployments to the Mediterranean during the 1980s frequently placed VA-82 in tense situations in the Middle East. During an August 1981 deployment to the Med, the Marauders flew missions in support of freedom-of-navigation operations off Libya and contingency operations off Egypt after the October 1981 assassination of President Anwar Sadat. After a relatively uneventful 1982–1983 deployment, a 1985 deployment took the squadron off Lebanon when Arab radicals hijacked TWA Flight 847. VA-82's final deployment on board *Nimitz* took the squadron to the Mediterranean and around the world in 1987.

Upon return to Cecil Field, VA-82 was redesignated VFA-82 on 13 July 1987, and became the first operational squadron to fly the F/A-18C version of the Hornet. The Marauders joined CVW-1 on board *America* and deployed to the Med and Indian Ocean in May 1989. In September 1989, the squadron covered the evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon.

In 1990, VFA-82 rode *Constellation* (CV 64) around Cape Horn as the carrier moved to Philadelphia, Pa., for a service-life extension. That December, *America* deployed to the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf as part of

**Below, A-7C Corsair IIs of VA-82 fly in formation during the squadron's third Vietnam deployment, 1972–1973. Facing page, a VFA-82 F/A-18C Hornet operating from *Enterprise* (CVN 65) flies near the North Arabian Sea in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in November 2003. Photo by Ltjg. Perry Solomon.**





Operation Desert Shield, the build-up in response to Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. When Operation Desert Storm combat operations began on 17 January 1991, VFA-82 F/A-18Cs flew strikes against Iraqi forces. By the end of the 44-day war, the Marauders had flown 597 strike sorties and dropped more than 1.2 million pounds of ordnance. The squadron returned home in April 1991.

VFA-82 deployed to the Med and Arabian Gulf in December 1991, and returned in August 1993, participating in Operation Deny Flight over Bosnia and Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. In August 1995, the squadron's last deployment on board *America* took it to the region again, where the Marauders flew strikes in Bosnia in support of Operation Deliberate Force and supported Operation Southern Watch, the enforcement of no-fly zones over southern Iraq.

Assigned to *George Washington* (CVN 73), VFA-82 deployed in October 1997 to the Med and Arabian Gulf, again in support of Southern Watch. Upon return, the squadron temporarily shifted homeport to NAS Jacksonville, Fla., after Cecil Field was selected for closure. The squadron deployed again to the Arabian Gulf in September 1999, flying in combat during Southern Watch sorties from the deck of *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67), becoming the first Navy squadron to use the Joint Direct-Attack Munition (JDAM) in combat. Upon return, VFA-82 shifted homeport to MCAS Beaufort.



After al Qaeda terrorists struck New York and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) deployed on 19 September for the Arabian Sea. For four months beginning in November 2001, VFA-82 joined in the air campaign against the Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. The Marauders delivered more than 440,000 pounds of ordnance, including laser-guided bombs and JDAMs, against armored vehicles, structures, caves, and other targets. The squadron provided direct support to special operations forces and Marines engaged in ground combat. The Operation Enduring Freedom campaign involved flying distances between 450 and 850 miles to the target areas, with the average mission lasting five hours. The deployment included 159 consecutive days at sea.

In August 2003, VFA-82 deployed on board *Enterprise* (CVN 65) to the Arabian Gulf in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, flying combat missions over Iraq in support of U.S. and coalition ground operations. For its final deployment, VFA-82's long association with CVW-1 ended as the squadron joined CVW-2 on board *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72) and deployed to the western Pacific in October 2004. The carrier diverted to Indonesia in December 2004 to provide relief operations in the wake of a devastating tsunami. The Marauders returned home for the last time in March 2005 and prepared for deactivation. ✈