APPENDIX 4

U.S. Navy Squadron Designations and Abbreviations

HE SYSTEM OF SQUADRON designations was established to help define part of naval aviation's organizational structure and help identify the operational and administrative functions of aviation within the fleet. Just as the designations for ships, such as DD, CA, BB, etc., were used to define the duties of the specific units and their alignment within the fleet organization, so also were the squadron designations established to formulate the responsibilities and alignment within naval aviation and the fleet structure.

During naval aviation's early years there were big question marks concerning naval aviation's ability to succeed as a functional component of the fleet and whether it would survive due to the limited capabilities of the aircraft. In official publications and references, such as the Daily Aviation News Bulletin of 1 October 1919, casual terms were used to describe or identify various aircraft squadrons and units. The casual terms were used because no specific fleet aviation organizational structure for squadrons had been officially established. Prior to 1919, naval aircraft, excluding Marine Corps planes, were primarily assigned to shore stations. Therefore, in order to integrate aviation into the fleet, it was necessary to develop a fleet organization that included aviation units. The development of a system of squadron designations is discussed in Chapter 1.

In general terms, the Navy's system for designating naval aircraft squadrons has usually conformed to the following loose classification structure:

- (1) Squadron designations were based on specific letters used for indicating the missions for each particular type of squadron and its assigned aircraft. As an example, a World War II squadron operating the F4U Corsair aircraft would have been designated a fighting squadron (VF). The letter F, for fighting or fighter, was the key in identifying the type of squadron and was also used in the aircraft's designation.
- (2) Identification numbers were assigned to each squadron, such as VF-1. The number 1 separates Fighter Squadron 1 (VF-1) from Fighter Squadron 10 (VF-10).

There have been many variations to this basic system throughout naval aviation's history. Changes were

also made to the designation system when new plane types were developed and new squadrons were formed to carry out those new missions. There is no logical sequence for the numerical designation assigned the various squadrons throughout most of naval aviation's history. The Marine Corps did establish a logical sequence for their squadron designations, however, there are variations to this system, too.

As Navy squadrons were established, disestablished or redesignated, many of the same letters and numbers were reused and assigned at a later date for newly established or redesignated units, hence, the lineage of a squadron cannot always be traced or linked by using the same designation. As an example, VF-1 from World War II has no direct relationship to VF-1 established in the 1970s. The rich tradition and heritage of the various squadrons in the Navy has not always been carried over because of the break in continuity between units. Once a squadron is disestablished that ends its history. If a new squadron is established using the same designation of a previous squadron it does not have any direct relationship with that unit. The reuse of many of the same letters and numerical designations adds considerable confusion to the squadron designation system. A new squadron may carry on the traditions of a previous squadron, just as a ship that has been assigned the same name more than once carries on the traditions of the past ships with the same name. However, a squadron, just like a ship, can not claim a heritage or historical link to the old unit with the same designation.

Consistency has been the major ingredient lacking in the Navy's squadron designation system. As an example, the use of "Plane" in squadron designations was not consistent during the 1920s. Sometimes the full designation would be written differently, depending on the squadron's assignment to the Battle Fleet, Scouting Fleet, or Asiatic Fleet. A designation such as Scouting Squadron and Scouting Plane Squadron, which used the same abbreviation, VS, was listed in the *Navy Directory* as Scouting Squadron under the Battle Fleet and Scouting Plane Squadron under the Scouting Fleet. The use of "Plane" in squadron designations was most likely designed to identify the squadron as an aviation unit, vice a destroyer squadron. This seems to be especially true during the

1920s when aviation was first being integrated into the fleet organization and operations. The *Navy Directory*: Monthly Report, Status of Naval Aircraft; and the Bureau of Aeronautics, Weekly Newsletter all list squadron designations using "Plane." The Chief of Naval Operations' Naval Aeronautical Organization, published for each Fiscal Year, lists the squadron designations without using "Plane" in the designation. It is obvious there is no difference between the squadrons with or without the use of "Plane" in the squadron designation. The acronym remained the same, with or without the use of "Plane" in the full squadron designation. In the 1930s the squadron designations listed in all four sources identified above usually refer to the squadron using its abbreviated designation, such as VF Squadron 1 (VF-1) instead of Fighting Plane Squadron 1. In the 1940s the use of "Plane" in the full squadron designation is dropped.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the VC squadron designation was used to identify a group of squadrons with several different missions but all assigned the VC designation. Missions for specific Composite Squadrons (VC) included all-weather night, attack and defense; air early warning; anti-submarine warfare; and photographic. The only identifying factor to separate the different types of Composite Squadrons was the numerical designation. In the late 1940s the single digit numbers were for the Composite Night or Attack and Defense units, those numbers in the teens were for Composite Air Warning squadrons, numbers in the 20s and 30s were for Composite Anti-Submarine units, and the numbers in the 60s were for Composite Photographic squadrons.

Besides the composite squadrons (VC), several patrol squadrons (VP) had specific mission requirements that were different from its normal patrol and reconnaissance duties. However, these squadrons still maintained the normal VP designation. In the late 1940s there were two VP squadrons with a primary mission of photographic and one with an air early warning mission. VP-61 and VP-62 were the photographic squadrons and VP-51 was the air early warning squadron.

The special VC and VP designated units, were on the cutting edge of technology, which eventually lead to the development of specialized squadron designations in the 1950s and 1960s. Squadrons such as VAW (Carrier Airborne Early Warning), VAQ (Tactical Electronic Warfare), and VQ (Electronic Countermeasures or Air Reconnaissance) were the result of technical developments in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The use of an abbreivated squadron designation with different missions occurred in the early 1950s when the VJ designation was used for both photographic squadrons and weather squadrons. VJ-1 and 2 were designated Weather Squadrons or Weather Reconnaissance Squadrons. VJ-61 and 62 were designated Photographic Squadrons. The missions were totally

different for these two types of squadrons but they used a common abbreivated squadron designation.

There are four factors that play a role in developing or changing squadron designations. They have been around since the introduction of aviation in the Navy and will continue to be the primary factors effecting squadron designations. The factors are:

- 1. the duties or mission of a squadron
- 2. technical advances in aircraft or equipment
- 3. changes in tactics or development of new tactics
- 4. changes in naval aviation or fleet organization

The following is a list of various squadron designations used by the Navy since the early 1920s. It does not include Marine Corps squadron designations. The list is in alphabetical order rather than in the chronological order of squadron development. The general time frame for when the designation was in use is listed with the squadron designation. Further elaboration on the assignment of squadrons to other organizations and their designations such as: a battle group, carrier air wing, cruiser group, fleet air force, scouting fleet, Asiatic Fleet, naval district, reserves, etc..., has not been included in this list to prevent it from becoming to confusing or extensive. The only exception to this is for the reserves. Reserve squadron designations, beginning in 1970, are included in this list. In 1970 the naval air reserve was reorganized and the squadron structure and arrangement was aligned to mirror the squadron designation system in existence for active fleet units.

U.S. NAVY SQUADRON DESIGNATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| Acronym | Full Squadron Designation | General time- frame in use |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| HAL or HA(L) | Helicopter Attack Squadron Light | 1967-1972 1976-1988 |
| HC | Helicopter Combat Support Squadron | 1965-present |
| HCS | Helicopter Combat Support Special | |
| | Squadron | 1988-present |
| HCT | Helicopter Combat Support Training | |
| | Squadron | 1974-1977 |
| HM | Helicopter Mine Countermeasures | |
| | Squadron | 1971-present |
| HS | Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron | 1951-present |
| HSL | Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron | |
| | (Light) | 1972-present |
| HT | Helicopter Training Squadron | 1960-present |
| HTU | Helicopter Training Unit | 1950-1957 |
| HU | Helicopter Utility Squadron | 1948-1965 |
| RVAH | Reconnaissance Attack Squadron | 1964-1979 |
| RVAW | Carrier Airborne Early Warning | |
| | Training Squadron | 1967-1983 |
| STAGRON | Special Air Task Force Squadron (VK) | 1943-1944 |
| TACRON | Tactical Squadron or Tactical Air | |
| | Control Squadron or Tactical Control | |
| | Squadron | 1946-present |
| VA | Attack Squadron | 1946-present |
| VA(AW) | All-Weather Attack Squadron | 1956-1959 |
| VAH or VA(H) | J 1 | 1955-1971 |
| VA(HM) | Attack Mining Squadron | 1956-1959 |

U.S. NAVY SQUADRON DESIGNATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS—Continued

U.S. NAVY SQUADRON DESIGNATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS—Continued

| Acronym | Full Squadron Designation | General time- frame in use | Acronym | Full Squadron Designation | General time- frame in use |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------|---|-------------------------------|
| VAK | Tactical Aerial Refueling Squadron | 1979-1989 | VPB | Patrol Bombing Squadron | 1944-1946 |
| VAL or VA(L) | Light Attack Squadron | 1969-1972 | VP-HL | Heavy Patrol Squadron (landplane) | 1946-1948 |
| VAP or VA(P) | Heavy Photographic Reconnaissance | | VPM | Meteorological Squadron | 1946-1947 |
| | Squadron or Photographic | | VP-ML | Medium Patrol Squadron (landplane) | 1946-1948 |
| | Reconnaissance Squadron (Heavy) or | | VP-MS | Medium Patrol Squadron (seaplane) | 1946-1948 |
| | Heavy Photographic Squadron | 1956-1971 | VPP or VP(P) | Photographic Squadron or Patrol | |
| VAQ | Carrier Tactical Electronics Warfare | | | Squadron (photographic) | 1946-1948 |
| | Squadron or Tactical Electronics | | VPU | Patrol Squadron Special Unit | 1982-present |
| | Warfare Squadron | 1968-present | VPW | Weather Reconnaissance Squadron | 1945-1948 |
| VAW | Carrier Airborne Early Warning | | VPW | Air Early Warning Squadron | 1948 |
| | Squadron | 1948 | VQ | Electronic Countermeasures Squadron | |
| | | 1956-present | VQ | Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron | 1961-present |
| VAW | Carrier Tactical Electronics Warfare | 4000 | VR | Transport Squadron or Air Transport | |
| LID | Squadron | 1968 | | Squadron or Fleet Logistic Air | 1010 1070 |
| VB | Bombing Squadron or Light Bombing | 1000 1040 | VD | Squadron | 1942-1958 |
| VDE | Plane Squadron | 1928-1946 | VR | Fleet Tactical Support Squadron | 1958-1976 |
| VBF | Bombing Fighting Squadron | 1945-1946 | VR | Fleet Logistics Support Squadron | 1976-present |
| VC | Composite Squadron | 1943-1945 | VRC or VR(C) | Fleet Tactical Support Squadron | 1960-1976 |
| VC | Float Composite Squadron | 1948-1956 | VRC VRE | Fleet Logistics Support Squadron | 1976-present 1945 |
| VC VCN | Fleet Composite Squadron Night Composite Squadron | 1965-present 1946-1948 | VRF | Air Transport Evacuation Squadron | 1943 |
| VCN VCP | Photographic Composite Squadron | 1959-1961 | VRF | Transport Ferry and Service Squadron Air Ferry Transport Squadron or | 1945-1940 |
| VCS | Cruiser Scouting Squadron | 1937-1945 | V ICI | Air Ferry Squadron | 1943-1948 |
| VD VD | Photographic Squadron | 1943-1946 | VRF or VR(F) | Aircraft Ferry Squadron | 1957-1986 |
| VE VE | Evacuation Squadron | 1944-1945 | VRJ VR(F) | Utility Transport Squadron | 1945-1946 |
| VF | Combat Squadron | 1922 | VRS | Air Ferry Service Squadron or Ferry | 1040 1040 |
| VF | Fighting Plane Squadron or Fighting | 1022 | VIG | Command Service Squadron | 1943-1946 |
| V1 | Squadron | 1922-1948 | VRU | Transport Utility Squadron | 1946-1948 |
| VF | Fighter Squadron | 1948-present | VS | Scouting Plane Squadron or | 1010 1010 |
| VFA | Fighter Attack Squadron | 1980-1983 | •• | Scouting Squadron | 1922-1946 |
| VFA | Strike Fighter Squadron | 1983-present | VS | Anti-Submarine Squadron or Air | 1022 1010 |
| VF(AW) | All-Weather Fighter Squadron | r | | Anti-Submarine Squadron or Carrier | |
| . (, | or Fighter (All-Weather) Squadron | 1956-1963 | | Air Anti-Submarine Squadron | 1950-1993 |
| VFN or VF(N) | Night Fighting Squadron | 1944-1946 | VS | Sea Control Squadron | 1993-present |
| VFP or VF(P) | Light Photographic Reconnaissance | | VSF | Anti-Submarine Fighter Squadron | 1965-1973 |
| | Squadron or Photographic | | VT | Torpedo & Bombing Plane Squadron o | r |
| | Reconnaissance Squadron or | | | Torpedo & Bombing Squadron | 1922-1930 |
| | Photographic Reconnaissance | | VT | Torpedo Plane Squadron | 1921 |
| | Squadron (Light) or Light | | VT | Torpedo Squadron | 1930-1946 |
| | Photographic Squadron | 1956-1987 | VT | Training Squadron | 1960-present |
| VGF | Escort-Fighter Squadron | 1942-1943 | VTN | Night Torpedo Squadron | 1944-1946 |
| VGS | Escort-Scouting Squadron | 1942-1943 | VU | Utility Squadron | 1946-1965 |
| VH | Rescue Squadron | 1944-1946 | VW | Air Early Warning Squadron or Airborn | |
| VJ | Utility Squadron or General Utility | | | Early Warning Squadron or Fleet | |
| 171 | Squadron | 1925-1946 | | Early Warning Squadron | 1952-1971 |
| VJ | Weather Squadron or Weather | 1050 1050 | VW | Weather Reconnaissance Squadron or | |
| W | Reconnaissance Squadron | 1952-1953 | | Fleet Weather Reconnaissance Squadron | 1967-1975 |
| VJ | Photographic Squadron | 1952-1956 | VX | Experimental Squadron | 1927-circa |
| VK | Special Air Task Force Squadron (STAGRON) | 1943-1944 | | | 1943 |
| VN | Training Squadron | 1943-1944 | VX | Experimental and Development | |
| VO | Spotting Squadron | 1927-1947 | | Squadron or Operational Development | |
| VO | Observation Plane Squadron or | 1322 | | Squadron or Air Operational | |
| VO | Observation Squadron | 1923-1945 | | Development Squadron or Air | |
| | Observation squadron | 1947-1949 | | Development Squadron | 1946-1968 |
| | | 1967-1968 | VX | Air Test and Evaluation Squadron | 1969-present |
| VOC | Composite Spotting Squadron | 1944-1945 | VXE | Antarctic Development Squadron | 1969-present |
| VOF | Observation Fighter Squadron | 1942-1945 | VXN | Oceanographic Development Squadron | - |
| VP | Seaplane Patrol Squadron | 1922 | ZJ | Blimp Utility Squadron | 1944-1945 |
| VP | Patrol Squadron | 1924-1944 | ZK | Kite Balloon Squadron | 1922-1924 |
| | * | 1946 | ZKN | Kite Balloon Training Squadron | * |
| | | 1948-present | ZKO | Kite Balloon Observation Squadron | * |
| VP-AM | Amphibian Patrol Squadron | 1946-1948 | ZNN | Non-rigid Airship Training Squadron | * |
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U.S. NAVY SQUADRON DESIGNATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS—Continued

| Acronym | Full Squadron Designation | General time- frame in use |
|---------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ZNO | Non-rigid Airship Observation Squadro | n * |
| ZNP | Non-rigid Airship Patrol Squadron | * |
| ZNS | Non-rigid Airship Scouting Squadron | * |
| ZP | Airship Patrol Squadron | 1942-1961 |
| ZP | Blimp Squadron | 1942-1961 |
| ZP | Airship Patrol Squadron (All-Weather | |
| | Anti-Submarine) or Airship Squadron | |
| | or LTA Patrol Squadron | 1942-1961 |
| ZRN | Rigid Airship Training Squadron | * |
| ZRP | Rigid Airship Patrol Squadron | * |

U.S. NAVY SQUADRON DESIGNATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS—Continued

| Acronym | Full Squadron Designation | General time- frame in use |
|---------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ZRP | Rigid Airship Patrol Squadron | * |
| ZRS | Rigid Airship Scouting Squadron | * |
| ZS | Airship Anti-Submarine Squadron | * |
| ZW | Airship Early Warning Squadron | 1956-1961 |
| ZX | Airship Operational Development | |
| | Squadron or Airship Development | |
| | Squadron | 1950-1957 |
| | | |

 $[\]overline{^*}$ These squadron designations were developed, however, the Navy never established any squadrons using the designations.