T
HE LINEAGE OF NAVY AVIATION squadrons has
been a source of confusion since the advent of the
squadron concept after World War I. Much of this con-
fusion arose because of the terminology used by the
Navy; the lack of a consistent policy in selecting al-
phanumerical squadron designations; the reuse of letter
and numeric designations; the many establishments, re-
designations and disestablishments of aviation
squadrons; and the use of the same insignia by different
squadrons. Naval aviation insignia is a modern form of
heraldry that dates back to the early period of Naval
Aviation in the 1920s and captures many proud mo-
ments of its history. This practice fosters a sense of
pride, unit cohesion and contributes to high morale, es-
prit de corps and professionalism within the naval avia-
tion community. It also serves as an effective means of
preserving a command’s tradition, continuity of purpose
and recognition, as traced by the squadron’s lineage.

The following terms are essential in developing an
understanding of how lineage is determined:

Establishment: A squadron’s lineage and history be-
gins on the date it is established and assigned a letter
and number designation, such as VP-46. In the past
the terms commission and decommission have been
incorrectly used interchangeably with establishment
and disestablishment, resulting in additional confusion
regarding squadron lineage. These terms should not
be used interchangeably and should not be connected
with each other. Commission and decommission refer
only to ships. They do not refer to squadrons because
squadrons do not receive commissioning pennants
when they are established.

Redesignation: A squadron’s function may be
changed from time to time due to changes in technol-
gy or mission requirements. As an example, a
squadron such as VP-1, established as Bombing
Squadron 128 (VB-128) during World War II, under-
goes the following redesignations: Patrol Bombing
Squadron 128 (VPB-128), Patrol Squadron 128 (VP-
128), Medium Patrol Squadron (landplane) 1(VP-ML-1)
and then to Patrol Squadron 1(VP-1). These redesigna-
tions involved changes in the squadron’s mission as
well as the type of aircraft assigned to the squadron.

Deactivation: This term means the squadron’s per-
nersonnel and equipment are all reassigned and it is
placed on an inactive status list. The squadron designa-
tion remains on a record of inactive squadrons until
it is reactivated and becomes an active operating unit
once again.

 Reactivation: A squadron may be reactivated from
the inactive list and placed back in active operational
service with new personnel and equipment. When this
occurs, the squadron can only be reactivated using the
last designation it was assigned prior to deactivation.
The history of this reactivated squadron may be traced
using the lineage of the squadron prior to its deactiva-
tion. A squadron cannot be deactivated and reacti-
vated the same day or activated and redesignated on
the same day.

Under current Navy policy for squadron designations
and lineage, as set forth by CNO’s OPNAV Instruction
5030.4E of 19 March 1998, once a squadron letter and
number have been assigned to a squadron, that letter
and number combination can never be assigned to an-
other squadron. As an example, if VP-5, a currently ac-
tive squadron, were to be deactivated none of the
squadron’s designations in its lineage could be used as
a designation for the establishment of a new squadron.
That means the following designs in VP-5’s line-
eage could never be used to establish a new squadron:
VP-17F, VP-17, VP-42, VB-135, VPB-135, VP-135, VP-
ML-5 and VP-5. VP-5, if deactivated, could be reactiv-
ated and placed in an operational status but all the
former designations in VP-5’s lineage will always be as-
sociated with only VP-5. Hence, the letter and number
combinations of VP-17F, VP-17, VP-42, VB-135, VPB-
135, VP-135 and VP-ML-5 may never be used again by
any squadron other than VP-5.

Historically, confusion has reigned regarding
squadrons that have been assigned the same designa-
tion. As an example, since the squadron concept was
established in the early 1920s there have been five
separate squadrons assigned the VP-1 designation.
Hence, when one speaks of VP-1 you have to ask
what time frame in order to identify the correct
squadron. Due to the confusion resulting from the use
of the same designation time after time, with no line-
eage connection between these squadrons, the new
set of guidelines, referenced in the above paragraph,
were developed to end the lineage and insignia confu-
sion. After 1998, when a squadron is deactivated its
designation and approved insignia will be placed on
the inactive list. The lineage and insignia of the
squadron is retired and remains with the history of
that deactivated squadron. A newly established
squadron cannot adopt the insignia of a deactivated
unit. A squadron that is reactivated will use the in-
signia it had approved for use prior to its deactivation.

The old policy regarding squadron lineage was pub-
lished in Appendix 5 of the Dictionary of American
Naval Aviation Squadron, Volume 1, The History of VA,
VAH, VAK, VAL, VAP and VFA Squadrons.