

# A P-3C Pilot Looks Back on VP-45 and the Cold War



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*by: Don Stanton*  
*VP-45, 1976 - 1979*

## A P-3C Pilot Looks Back On VP-45 and The Cold War

by Don Stanton (VP-45 1976-79)

Mention of the “Cold War” brings little response from today’s students or even from some adults. Many Americans are still unaware of the significant events and sacrifices over the 44 years of Cold War, which began in 1947 with the “*The Truman Doctrine*” to contain Communism and ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Trillions of dollars were spent and millions of Americans served on military bases, remote outposts, ships, submarines, aircraft, and missile silos; to maintain a constant vigil across the world...and thousands were killed or injured. We have now entered a “*New Cold War*” which has required the redeployment of military, cyber, and intelligence assets at great costs to the Nation.

In his 1953 speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, President Eisenhower noted: “*The free world knows, out of the bitter wisdom of experience, that vigilance and sacrifice are the price of liberty.*”

In 1977 during my VP-45 tour, over 2 million Americans were on active duty with about 530,000 in the Navy (2016: 1.3 million & 326,000 Navy). In the 1950s and 60s, everyone had a “*Draft Card*” and unless they had a deferment, were called into service at age 18 to enable the US to contain Communist expansion.



If you see the flash, duck and cover!

A 1950's Cold War poster.

There were many incidents and casualties during

the Cold War which the American public remains unaware of today. Every day and night, Navy crews were on patrol, tracking Soviet submarines and ships, and gathering intelligence. P-3s were part of



A P-3 banks hard to starboard to return to datum (where the submarine is).

vast Navy ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) efforts to locate, track, and be ready to attack and destroy Soviet submarines in the event of war. During my first tour 1976-79, the Navy lost five P-3s to mishaps (VP-11, VP-23, VP-8, VP-22 and VP-9) and over 50 men died or were injured. These were highly skilled volunteers (the “*Volunteer Force*” began in 1973) from all over the US, who stepped-up to serve in the Navy.

\*\*\*The following overview of the Cold War and VP deployments to Keflavik and Sigonella is a remembrance to those who served and is specifically dedicated to the memories of *LT Mike Hayes, LCDR Bob Moseley, AMSC JT Clark, Captain Barry Applebee USAF*, and all those volunteers who died flying on Cold War ops.

### Keflavik (KEF)

We lugged our gear into Hangar 1000 of NAS JAX- (sonville) around Christmas 1976 for the 5+ month deployment to Keflavik, Iceland. 23 of us boarded a P-3C and I squeezed into my assigned spot which



*Hangar 1000 at NAS Jacksonville in the mid 70's.*

We had left the live oaks, humidity, and morning paper mill smell of JAX for cold Keflavik on the Arctic Circle, where in late December there were only 4-5 hours of sun hanging low on the horizon. We landed at KEF in the blustery darkness, were towed into the old WWII hangar, and the main cabin door opened and in came the cold air, Icelandic Customs, and our squadron mates. While Customs worked, beers were passed around to us on the plane--I was surprised by this and wasn't sure what to do--but quickly realized I was finally in the real VP world!

Two of us were new guys assigned to the XO's crew. Someone had ar-

was a fold-down seat sandwiched between two computer equipment bays. It had taken me 18 months at flight school and VP-30 RAG (Replacement Air Group) learning the P-3 and ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) tactics to get into this seat and I was very glad—and apprehensive--about joining a deploying operational patrol squadron and fly the new P-3C. I watched the NAVCOM as he navigated us along the 3500-mile route up to Keflavik so I could get up to speed learning the aircraft and gain the trust of and integrate into my 12-man crew. Today, I am still amazed by how the squadron could expeditiously pack up all its gear into collapsible metal footlockers, load aboard three Air Force C-141s, fly 9 P-3s, and deploy far away to start immediate ASW ops.



*The beautiful RAF Nimrod ASW aircraft.*

ranged for a transiting senior RAF (Royal Air Force) Nimrod Flight Sergeant aircrewman, with a superb handle-bar mustache, to be dressed up as the new Ensign. They smuggled the Flight Sergeant aboard the aircraft and he walked up to the XO in the flight station and, in his best American accent said, "Sir, I'm your new NAVCOM Ensign L...", shocking the XO until the real Ensign L. appeared.

Our sister squadron, VP-49, was in the process of turning over to VP-45 so our arriving crews, after minimum crew rest, were immediately put on the schedule for operational patrols. As an incoming 45 crew went out on an 8-hour patrol relieving a 49 crew and silently --we were always in EMCON (Emis-



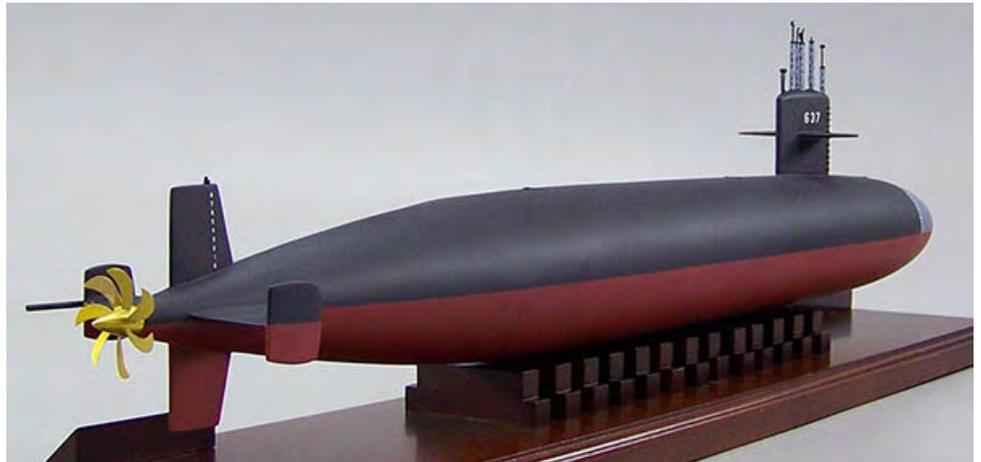
*NAS Keflavick, Iceland.*

sions Control) -- picking up submarine contact, a 49 crew was released to return to JAX. I showed up for my first brief and a senior Lieutenant said “Who the f\_\_\_ are you? Let’s see some ID!” since I did look strange: a very junior pilot wearing LT bars, fresh from the RAG.

## Cold War Anti-Submarine Warfare Ops

From the 1950s, the three Navy communities: Submarine, Surface, and Air (P-2Vs, P-3s, S-2s, and Helicopters) all contributed to the round-the-clock hunt and tracking of submarines. VP provided unique long-range and rapid reaction capabilities to support the Navy’s Fleet ASW and intelligence gathering. Norwegian P-3s tracked Russian subs as they transited around the Kola Peninsula and turned them over to the US. As they headed south, our mission was to locate and/or track the subs south to determine whether they were heading toward the G-I gap (Greenland-Iceland); which meant they were headed deep into the Atlantic or via the I-UK gap (Iceland-United Kingdom) to head down towards the eastern Atlantic or possibly via Gibraltar into the Mediterranean. VP squadrons were focused on tracking Soviet missile boats (and attack submarines) which were a key strategic threat to the US. In 1977, the Sovi-

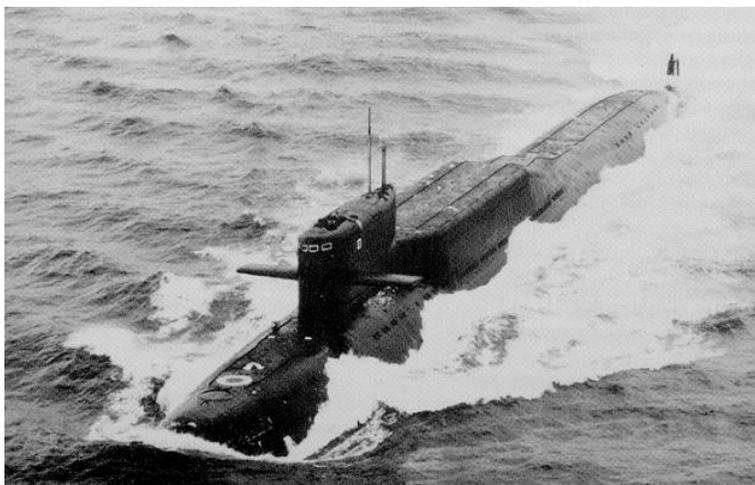
ets had about 33 *Yankee* missile boats (1300 mile missile range) and 21 newer *Delta* boats (4200 mile range meant they didn’t even have to deploy far.) The *Yankees* had to operate relatively close in patrol areas east of Bermuda and in the Eastern Pacific to target US cities and defense establishments with nuclear ballistic missiles.



US Navy SSN-637 Class Sub - the primary Attack Sub of the 70’s era.

American submarines were the premier anti-submarine force; in peacetime, VP’s job was to locate and track submarines and be ready in the event of a nuclear war, to assist in attacking Soviet “boomers” before they launched their nukes or to torpedo Soviet attack boats threatening our submarines. During our KEF deployment, the Soviet Northern Fleet, which had about 125 submarines, conducted its annual month-long exercise which NATO called *SpringEx 77*.

Cold War sub hunting was a complex, expensive, and coordinated effort: attack boats (SSNs) were the primary force of ASW operations and carrier-based S-3s, SH-3 helicopters, and surface ships all contributed. During the Cold War, the East Coast Navy deployed VP squadrons continuously to Keflavik, Bermuda, Lajes in the Azores, Rota, Spain, and Sigonella, Sicily. Norway, UK, Canada, and the Netherlands all contributed patrol aircraft to ASW efforts--and often worked together out of KEF and other bases.



Soviet Delta Class SSBN (missile boat - “boomer”).

*\*\*Tragically, throughout this time, US Navy spies John Walker, Jerry Whitworth, and associates were active and though we didn’t know it, many of our ASW efforts were being compromised due*

to their pathetic greed. In the 1980s, Toshiba-Kongsberg sold the Soviets some 9 axis milling machines which enabled them to machine smoother complex curves on submarine propellers and suddenly, Russian submarines became much more silent and harder to track.\*\*

**Crew Concept.** The squadron had 12 CACs or Combat Air Crews. Each crew contained 12 men: 2 NFOs-TACCO (Tactical Coordinator) and a NAVCOM (Navigator Communicator), 3 pilots, a Flight Engineer and a Second Mech, 2 Acoustic and 1 Non-acoustic sensor operators, an Ordnanceman, and an IFT (In Flight Technician). The Navy had invested years



A P-3 Crew gathers in “the tube” for the pre-flight briefing.

in training each crewmember in their position. You might be the “best” at your position, but what really counted was your ability to work within a team and contribute to the crew’s success. While some crews just seemed lucky and were more successful at finding and hanging onto subs, luck was only a small part, as it was really all about creating a team and meshing together crewmembers’ skills and personalities to make them successful. We trained, flew, and went everywhere together—especially on deployment.

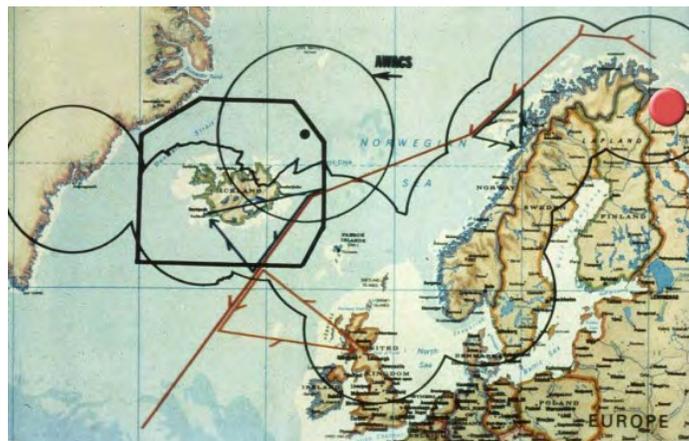
The crew I was assigned to over 3 years was a constantly changing composite of varying backgrounds. One officer’s father had been a B-52 pilot, another’s an Army officer, another’s a farmer; some of us had come through Navy ROTC or the Naval Academy and others via AOCS (Aviation Officer Candidate School). We

came from Florida, Georgia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and Maryland; most of us were also from inland towns looking for adventure.

One crew started calling themselves “Blue Silk” to imprint the concept of smoothly operating together. I immediately liked the VP crew concept because, although we were 5 officers and 7 enlisted, everyone was recognized by their professional skills and we worked to weld ourselves into a close team. This did not just happen; the Operations Officer, XO, and CO worked to build and balance the crews. For example, a new PPC (Patrol Plane Commander) might be paired with a senior seasoned TACCO (Tactical Coordinator) who would also be the Mission Commander. Both Naval Flight Officers (NFOs) and pilots could become Mission Commanders and attain squadron command.

The average squadron tour was 3 years, so every year before the next deployment, 1/3 of crewmembers and squadron personnel were replaced, which meant that we were constantly in a training and upgrading mode to rebuild crew qualifications.

Crews were briefed 3 hours ahead of takeoff time and then were dropped off to preflight the aircraft. We dropped our gear and helmet bags near our stations and started our routines. As the crew’s junior pilot, my job was to preflight the outside of the aircraft and I remember the cold darkness, the gusting winds, trying to do a good preflight with my flashlight, and wanting to get back



Keflavick ASW Operation Areas.

into the cozy warmth of the plane. By the time my crew arrived in KEF, the squadron had run out of those nice big Air Force parkas, so as a new guy, I only got a hood with fur which I tied on with my leather Navy flight jacket and braced myself against the wind.

During preflight, if any of the critical ASW avionics or mechanical systems went hard down, everyone had to pack-up their gear and move quickly over to another aircraft and hustle to make-up lost time in order to still takeoff on time. Everything was built around getting on station exactly on time to relieve a crew passively (no comms) and have a smooth turn-over on, hopefully, a hot contact. Typically, it took about 2 hours to get out on station with 4 hours on station, and then 2 hours transit back home

**Squadrons.** Each squadron has a different reputation depending on a combination of its leadership, personnel, and history. Back then, a VP squadron had 9 P-3Cs and 12 Combat Air Crews. The squadron had 350-400 personnel including crews and hundreds of very skilled sailors ranging from mechanics and avionics technicians to operational and tactical support for our 9 ASW aircraft. There were 24 active duty and 8 reserve squadrons covering deployments around the world. Since most of the Soviet nuclear missile and attack boats were in the deep Atlantic and diesel boats in the Med, Jacksonville and Brunswick squadrons had the most opportunity for tracking submarines. The squadron was designed to be self-supporting for long periods and be able to shift ASW operations to distant bases within a matter of hours.

**Weather.** Big storms, winds, and changing weather routinely hit Iceland, so taxiing and taking off could be challenging in high gusting winds on icy concrete. KEF was notorious for quickly changing weather and heavy winds so our linesmen often tied themselves to the “*Buddha*” (big push-back tractor) to keep them from being blown into the propellers. One night, one of our planes ground-looped (cocked

into wind) while taxiing out in high gusting winds on an icy taxiway. Sven, KEF’s “*Snow King*,” led a crew who used big brushes and plows to keep the runway constantly open in the teeth of winter. White-outs were a threat, especially in the dark of winter, so we had to be careful not to get disoriented and lost in blowing snow.

**Sonobuoys and Plot Stab(alization).** At KEF we flew a “*high mission*” and dropped sonobuoys (1, 3, or 8 hour settings) from somewhere around 14,000 to 16,000 feet (if memory serves). It took quite a while for the buoys to drop and we often had problems with them freezing up on the way down, so it could be a crap shoot if they would come up and then valuable minutes were lost. I remember certain brands of sonobuoys had high failure rates. We were constantly marking on top of a buoy to maintain plot stabilization so that we knew where the buoy pattern

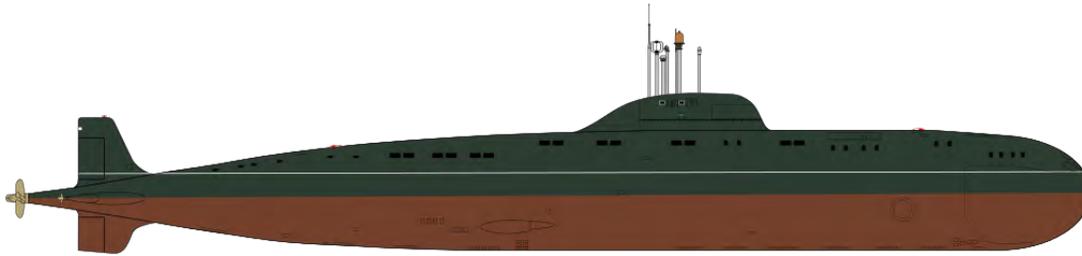


*Pre-flight de-icing at NAS Keflavick*

was in order to track a Soviet sub accurately. The Navy worked on P-3 Update I, II, III variants which, among other improvements, enabled P-3s not to have to constantly fly back to mark on top a buoy with the OTPI (On Top Position Indicator) to update the plot stab. Sometimes strange things happened: one night a crew recorded sounds from a sonobuoy that sounded like Russian voices; it turned to be drunk Icelandic fishermen who had hauled the buoy up in their nets and were talking to the hydrophone.

**Flaps.** During “*Flaps*” on Russian subs, the squadron

flew its aircraft around the clock. It usually took a couple of hours to get on station, you silently relieved another crew, worked on station for about 4 hours, and then returned to KEF. I was extremely impressed by entire squadron's determination and total focus on its mission of prosecuting Soviet submarines aggressively and maintaining contact.



*Only seven of the Soviet Victor II version were made. they were noisy and easy to track.*



*A Pelican P-3 escorting a Soviet Bear.*

TACCO Warren Tisdale remembers: “Steve Frick picked me up in the duty truck when I got off the Air Force C-141 transport at KEF. He said the squadron was in a FLAP. I may have missed the term in VP-30, so Frick (half of Frick and Frack named by the XO; other half was By-rone Fisher, and their tumbling act) explained it stood for “F...ing Launch All Planes.” It was not unusual to be in contact with a Soviet submarine on the flights out of KEF; the water seemed to be good for propagating sound. On my first mission, we happened to see a Soviet Bear transiting south, as we tracked a submarine. Bob Moseley (also

*known as Reverend Moe) made a big deal out of my getting two Soviet contacts on my first flight.*

*One nice thing about KEF was the relatively long transit (compared to SLG) back to base—plenty of time for paperwork. “The Mole,” in addition to being a master NAVCOM and TACCO, was a lot of fun to have on your crew. On more than one occasion we shared Vienna sausages and Heineken on the BOQ balcony after a night flight. “Where was the FDA’s Food Pyramid when we needed it?”*

\*\*\* LT Warren Tisdale graduated from Davidson College in 1974, taught high school Algebra, and was later commissioned through AOCS in 1975, joining VP-45 in February 1977 on the KEF deployment. He also deployed to SIG twice, was TACCO NATOPS, and left the squadron and the Navy in 1980 after his 3 ½ year commitment post NFO Wings. Warren graduated from Duke Law School in 1983 and has been a career environmental law and land use attorney in Norfolk.

**Soviet Naval Expansion.** In 1964, Premier Nikita Khrushchev appointed Admiral Gorshkov to build-up the Soviet Navy rapidly and it had expanded into the Mediterranean by 1968. The USSR continued to increase its military budgets, and demonstrated their global naval reach in 1970 with over 200 ships and aviation units in the *Okean 70* exercise. In



*A Kiev Class Soviet aircraft carrier transiting in the Med.*



A Soviet IL-38 May (ASW) aircraft returning to base after another "no contact" anti-submarine patrol.

1975, the Soviets commissioned the *Kiev* aircraft carrier, and again demonstrated their worldwide naval capabilities in the *Okean 75* exercise involving over 200 ships, submarines, and aviation units.

**Various 1976-79 events.** During 1977 (while we were STILL deployed to KEF) Jimmy Carter became President, Disco was on the rise, and members of the Lynrd Skynrd band (named after their gym teacher in JAX) were killed in a plane crash. President Carter faced the "Second Oil Shock," promoted energy conservation and airline deregulation. In 1979, the Shah of Iran fled (while we were on our second SIG deployment), US Embassy personnel were taken hostage in Tehran, Ayatollah Khomeini took over Iran and later, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Buying power decreased as inflation rose and home 30-year Fixed Rate Mortgages increased from 8.79% in late 1976 to 12.9% in late 1979 (from FedPrimeRate.com).

Decreasing real military spending affected the Navy and some ASW readiness slipped. The Soviets had rapidly built-up their nuclear delivery systems--including submarines--and had greatly exceeded the US in "throw weight" nuclear capabilities. It wasn't until 1979 that President Carter and Premier Brezhnev signed the Salt II Treat-



An example of the huge Typhoon class SSBN.

ty which limited strategic missile development and launchers. As the Soviet Navy expanded, the New York Times reported in late 1977 that the Soviets had built a massive new SSBN (ballistic missile sub NATO named *Typhoon* to rival our upcoming Trident boats. The *Typhoon* was huge; it was 563 feet long and carried 20 ballistic missiles. By 1980 the Soviet Navy had 94 cruise & ballistic missile boats and 71 attack boats for a total of 480 submarines.

**The KEF routine** was brief-fly-debrief, *Brass Nut*, sleep (sometimes optional), try to do ground job at hangar...and repeat. While the *Brass Nut* was just a BOQ room converted to a bar run by the Ready 2 crew who stocked it and kept it in a constant state of readiness for visitors, but the 'Nut provided a very important international hub



Carter and Brezhnev signing SALT II Treaty.

for ASW crews and visitors. if you got there after hours, the crew would tend its own bar. One morning about 0730 we walked out of the 'Nut with beer bottles in hand and a little kid standing at a school bus stop in the dark pointed at me and asked his Mom "Why is that pilot drinking in the morning?" as she quickly hustled him away from our bad influence and onto the bus.



The Canadian "Argus" ASW Aircraft.

We hosted Canadian, British, Dutch, and any other crews who might be coming through KEF. "The Nut" (Officers' BOQ bar) "and

the Chief Petty Officers' "Saloon" and the Enlisted "Acey-Deucy" club were essential as KEF was isolated. Jim Cole recalls that *"The 1st Class Mess' was in the middle of the 3rd deck. Like the 'Nut' the Ready 2 crew had the responsibility of stocking and manning it every day. The R2 crew made and sold food which helped support the 1st Class Association."*



The First Class Mess.

**Mail for Jan Mayen.** On one patrol, we were asked to try to drop the mail in a sonobuoy container to the Norwegians manning the LORAN site on a tiny island north of the Arctic Circle. The Norwegians hadn't gotten mail for weeks and it was now January. The TACCO reported winds gusting to 70 knots (of course blowing us toward the cliffs) but the Norwegians claimed the winds were only 25 knots. The PPC made a couple of turbulent dry runs and finally dropped the mail on the icy beach at 200 feet in a wild gusty low pass. As we departed, the Norwegians said, *"Thanks very much for dropping our mail; we haven't had mail since before Christmas; no one has ever been able to drop before in 70 knots of wind!"*

Our IFT, Retired AVCM Jim Cole, recalls that flight: *"I remember one particular Jan Mayen mail-drop (not one of my favorite flights), where we came in for the drop, all was smooth until we came over that small plain and got behind the tops of the moun-*

*tain ridge. The wind was 'roiling' so bad over that ridge, that it flipped us over the 90 before we knew it---the cockpit had a heck of a fight (controlling the plane) from what I'd heard. I was doing duty at the door, in the old parachute harness secured to the deck D rings & I swear I saw horizon past the toes of my flight boots by the bottom edge of the door-that part of the memory is very vivid."*



IFT Jim Cole

\*\*\* AVCM Jim Cole grew up in Ipswich Massachusetts finished his career with VA-105 at NAS Cecil Field after 20 years in the Navy. He later spent over thirteen years at NADEP JAX, a majority of the time working in TMCEFA, P-3 Tech Pubs. He is retired in Jacksonville, FL.

**"Magic Power Levers."** *One dark night, Keflavik was reporting deteriorating weather with winds gusting more than 30 knots at over 30 degrees off the runway, light turbulence, and blowing snow as the PPC (Patrol Plane Commander) and I were briefing his approach after our 8-hour patrol when he said "You take it." As the GCA (Ground Controlled Approach) controller talked us onto glide path, I kept telling myself "Concentrate, stay on the gauges, smooth power changes, don't peek outside, keep scan going." I made tiny corrections with the rudder pedals according to the commands of the controller who set us up crabbing into the wind down the bumpy approach.*

*The windshield wipers going high speed made a thumping urgent sound and close to minimums we broke out of the clag and I transitioned outside to dazzling driving snow shooting past in the landing lights and saw the approach and runway lights shining up in the night. I fought to stay aligned on centerline compensating with crosswind corrections with wing-down and top rudder and flared to land smoothly...which was a very big mistake because the runway was slick and suddenly we were sliding sideways off centerline. But quickly, the 4 power levers started moving magically in my right hand as the PPC applied asymmetric thrust to correct to center-*

*line and compensate for my mistakes. I had maybe 350 flight hours total, my knees were shaking, but the lessons from this experience remained imprinted on me for life.*

*Months later, thanks to that experience, returning from our final mission on the deployment, I landed firmly in driving rain and gusting crosswinds and was able to maintain control as we started to hydroplane on the standing water.*

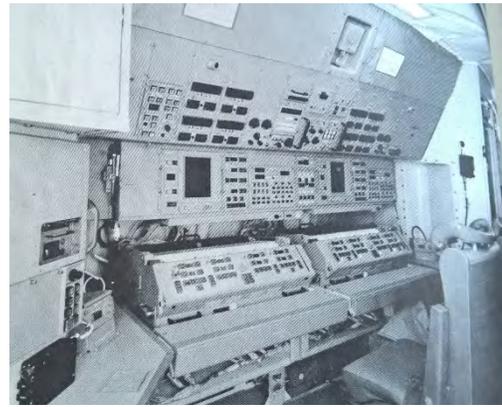
**The “Tube.”** (area of the aircraft interior aft of the flight station all the way back to the galley) was dominated on the port side by about 10 feet of computer bays that housed the CP901 “central computer” and associated equipment. The TACCO (Tactical Coordinator) managed the tactical picture via this new computer system and had a large 15” round display, a keyboard (as did the 3 sensor operators), a “track ball” roughly the size of an orange which was an early “mouse”, and a lot of push-buttons; we had a smaller tactical display in the cockpit. Due to the P-3C seating arrangement, crews had to learn



*The TACCO Station (just aft of the Flight Station).*

to communicate briefly and effectively via the Intercom; some TACCOs used long lead cords to be able to walk back to see sensor displays and talk with the operators. A lot of effort was being spent trying to perfect data link comms and the NAVCOMs were involved in data dumps to improve the system.

In the mid-60s, Sperry-Rand’s Univac Defense Systems Division started working with the Naval Air



*Dual AQA-7 acoustic processors at Sensor Stations 1 and 2.*

Development Center on a Navy contract to coordinate airborne patrol sensors. Univac developed the first airborne digital computer based on integrated circuits also being developed for USAF missile programs. This effort evolved into the CP-901 /ASQ-114 computer in 1968 which formed the avionics backbone of the top-of-the line P-3Cs which NAS Jacksonville squadrons flew as I joined VP-45 in 1976.

**The IFT (InFlight Tech).** The IFT was a new and vital position on P-3C crews to keep the moody CP-901 computer and avionics going. The CP-901 was notorious for dying at just the wrong time, like running in for an attack and mad trapping to maintain contact. It took a good crew to immediately transition to manual tracking when the CP-901 died. Another overall problem, when at home at JAX, was that the priority for avionics parts went to deployed squadrons and often key parts of the avionics suite were unavailable to keep all the aircraft up to ASW readiness.

Jim Cole, AVCM (ret), our CAC 2 IFT says: “...I have 5-10 times the computing power in my iPhone 6, than was in the man-sized, CP-901. Yet the “Charlie”, was such a quantum leap in ASW - I don’t think we’ll ever see another leap like that in weapon systems again.”

*I, like Admiral Tobin, feel really good about the sub-hunting we did, especially in the late Seventies, early Eighties. I am of the opinion that the later NUDs were the superior platform for finding subs and then some of the follow-on P-3C UPDATE aircraft. I think the Acquisition process, spun a bit out of control, got*

*too far ahead of itself, and bought new systems, utilizing unproven technology, way too quickly. I've heard more than one well experienced AW tell me that if they wanted to find a sub, they'd much prefer using one of the later DIFAR sets than the SASP or its follow-ons. The newer stuff sounded great in all the promotional literature, but put it On Station and it couldn't perform like they said it should. (Lot of new stuff bought like the old Scan Converter...remember that beast, sat under SS-3? Sounded great on paper, but you couldn't keep it operational.)*

In another squadron, our OTPI died just when we were tracking a Russian nuke in the middle of the Atlantic; our IFT tried to fix it, but we had to abort (losing contact) and request immediate launch of the ready crew which was over 2 hours away. I was so pissed off that I got out of the seat and went back and talked with our IFT. I unbolted the OTPI and asked him he had drop-tested it on the deck mat like this? (yes); had he put illegal Freon on the connections like this? (yes); had he thrown it into the freezer like this for 10 minutes-to rescrumble the electrons? (yes). So, I got a cup of coffee, took the OTPI out of the freezer, dropped it on deck, slammed it backed into its compartment, and went back to the galley when I heard Flight yell over the PA *"the OTPI is working!"* so we worked to regain our Plot Stab, regained contact and told the enroute Ready crew that we were back in contact!

We carried 84 buoys: 36 in racks internally and 48 externally loaded into belly chutes. The buoys could be set for 1, 3, or 8 hours life. Each TACCO had different buoy deployment tendencies; for example, when LT Stump ... started to lose contact, he would let loose a *"rain of steel"* to try to regain contact. I think buoys

cost about \$100 each for the common LOFAR and about \$500 for a DIFAR. Ordnancemen called the belly sonobuoy tube area *"Sherwood Forest."*

My retired Air Force friend, LtCol Steve Walsworth remembers being TDY at KEF for Christmas 1976 (he was a junior pilot at RAF Woodbridge England): *"We did 24/7 alerts for COMICEDEFOR. The evening that*



*An Air Force HC-130 Hercules.*

*we got in was the only night we could drink so we'd try to make the most of it at the O'Club on that night. Ran into some P-3 guys there and they invited us to the Brass Nut. Loved the jukebox with the inverted P3 flying over the carrier picture on it. We only needed 3 rooms, but Navy let us have 1 for a day room. Since we were from the 67th ARRS (Air Rescue and Recovery Service) the day room got named the "ARRS Hole." Someone made a really nice wood engraved sign and hung it over the door entrance. Every once in a while, somebody on a barracks inspection would spot the sign and tell us to take it down. We'd politely say "Yes Sir," wait till he was gone, and put it back up.*



*HC-130 and HH-3s (Jolly Green Giants)*



*Ordnanceman loading sonobuoys into the "P" (pressure) chutes.*

I remember one time the Jolly (HH-3) had just plugged into our (refueling) drogue and called "contact" and still had the mike keyed when he had a chips light come on and continued with "...Oh s\_\_t!" Chips-light in helos is a Land Now (!) emergency. Trouble was, we were over water about 3 miles off the coast. All we heard was the "contact...oh s\_\_t" and felt the helo unplug."

(Author's note: On my 1969 Midshipman summer cruise aboard the carrier *USS Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVA-42), I begged a ride on an SH-3. The AC let me ride in left seat as we delivered mail, etc. He said "just watch the annunciator panel and tell me if any lights go on." We were hovering and lowering the chaplain onto a destroyer when I saw a light come on and so I said "GEARBOX CHIPS." He said "S---" and suddenly he let the chaplain down very quickly and we pulled off and went down skimming the ocean all the way back to the *FDR*; I was trying to read the escape door instructions next to me!)

"The floor above us was "the Bone Yard boys"--nickname we gave the EC-121 guys because their planes were going to Davis Monthan AFB and getting replaced with AWACS. The last crew from one of the squadrons got really fired up one night. Got shopping carts from somewhere and had races on the second floor with a guy in each cart. They quit after 1 cart over shot the finish line and went down the stairs with a guy in it; he got banged up but didn't feel the pain."



*The strikingly beautiful USAF EC-121.*

\*\*\* LtCol Steve Walsworth graduated from San Jose State University and was commissioned through Air Force ROTC in 1973. He graduated from Air Force pilot training in 1974 and went to advanced Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS) training. Steve

was later stationed at RAF Woodbridge, UK and assigned to the 67th ARRS Squadron from 1976-1979 when he flew missions out of Keflavik, Iceland. He retired from the Air Force after 23 years with almost 5,000 hours of flight time and 5 rescue saves. He later flew for Vanguard Airlines and FedEx, retiring in 2011 after a 39-year aviation career.

One day a civilian pilot ferrying a single-engine plane across the North Atlantic called *Mayday* as he ditched well south of Iceland; KEF launched the SAR helicopter and found the pilot sitting on top of his canopy



*Checkertail F-4 in formation with P-3C.*

and rescued him! Another time a HC-130 and HH-3 worked to heroically rescued a very sick sailor from a submarine in the Atlantic.

The Air Force had a few EC-121s (Constellations) and a squadron of F-4 interceptors, the *Checkertails*, at KEF. The fighters were on constant alert so the pilots had bricks (walkie talkies)

with them; they also wore black and white checked ascots with their flight suits and shined their flight boots (we tried not to shine ours too much because someone had told us in flight school that too much shoe polish was a fire hazard). They also had their own BOQ bar called the *Whiff*(enpoof?) which was not the 'Nut by a long shot. One

day an Air Force pilot yelled "Dead Bug" (an Air Force tradition) and everyone hit the deck on their back with their legs up—the last one on their back had to buy the beer. Unfortunately, someone knocked a fighter pilot off his bar stool and he broke his elbow, so the fighter

squadron had one less interceptor pilot.

What do you think the Air Force did about this? True to form, they painted a red line around a corner of the bar room to be the “*Designated Dead Bug Area.*”

## A Very Brief Cold War Background

After uniting as allies to counter Hitler in WWII, the Soviet Union and the United States again became adversaries after the war ended and the USSR gobbled-up Eastern Europe. In 1946, Winston Churchill stated that “*From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.*” In his “*Sinews of Peace*” speech at Westminster College in Missouri.

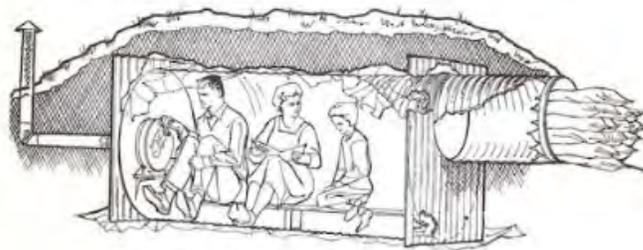
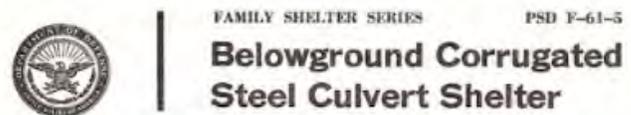
The National Security Act of 1947 restructured US military forces, created a unified defense establishment under a new Secretary of Defense, formed a separate Air Force, a Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Council. America was focused on stopping and containing Communism. Between 1948-52, the US Marshall Plan provided about \$120B (in today’s dollars) to help European countries recover from WWII, develop economically, and counter Communist advances. In 1949, Mao Zedong and the Communists took over China, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed, the USSR tested its first nuclear bomb (which had been greatly assisted by many Americans’ espionage), and “*the Admirals’ Revolt*” occurred against President Truman and his Secretary of Defense’s efforts to put most funding into USAF strategic bombers at the expense of the Navy and its aircraft carriers.



A Marshall Plan Poster

In 1950, President Truman instituted the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) to organize Civil Defense groups across the US to help Americans physi-

cally and psychologically prepare for--and potentially survive a nuclear attack. The Eisenhower Administration practiced running the government after a nuclear attack with “*Operation Alert*” annual exercises. Many Americans built fall-out shelters (the tough question



1961 DoD Fallout shelter plans.

then was “would you let your neighbors in?”) and we “*Baby Boomers*” remember being taught to “*duck and cover*” during air raid drills in elementary school.

During the 1950s, 60s & 70s, the US and our allies worked to contain Communism, fought wars in Korea (36,000 American deaths,) Vietnam (58,000) and supported proxy states to counter Communism in the Third World. Air Force and Navy reconnaissance and patrol aircraft often flew in harm’s way hem-stitching the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean coasts to collecting intelligence; many were intercepted, shot down, with aircrew imprisoned. During the “*Red Scare*” thousands of Americans were investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Senate Government Operations Committee—Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (Senator Joe McCarthy was thwarted in 1954). After Stalin’s death in 1953, Premier Nikita Khrushchev consolidated power and embarked on reforms and concentrated on rapidly developing strategic rocketry. In 1956, Khrushchev threatened Western diplomats stating that “*We will bury you*” and in 1957 bragged that the Soviet Union had “*all the rockets it needed.*”

**Nuclear Deterrence.** In the mid-1950s, General Curtis LeMay built up the Strategic Air Command (SAC) to about 2,000 bombers and 800 tankers. SAC

flew nuclear-armed B-52s around the clock and later manned ICBM (Inter Continental Ballistic Missile)

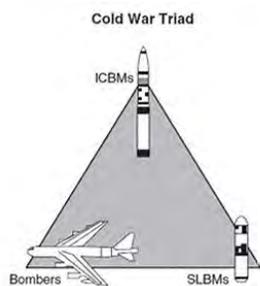
Shepard was America's first astronaut in space in the *Mercury* capsule.



*The B-52 strategic bomber. The oldest military aircraft still in service.*

silos. To deter the Soviets (and vice-versa) from a nuclear attack, missile sites were hardened and nuclear delivery systems evolved to be mobile enough to survive an initial attack and enable launch of retaliatory strikes. The mobility and stealth of the US submarine force was especially important for our national nuclear deterrence and many other Navy ASW forces--including VP--supported the subs. The Navy operated 41

Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) submarines which were a key part of the US strategic "Nuclear Triad" along with the B-52 bombers and ICBMs. This was a very dangerous time, with tactics including "preemptive nuclear first strike" and "Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)."



*Nuclear delivery Triad.*

With the 1957 launch of the *Sputnik* satellite, the US redoubled efforts to close the "missile gap" with the USSR. In 1958, the National Defense Education Act was passed to rapidly stimulate science, mathematics, and computer education in high schools and colleges. There was a national urgency that we needed to catch-up with the Russians in the "Space Race" and in 1961, President Kennedy promised to land a man on the moon before 1970.

Captain Gary Powers was shot down in his U-2 over Russia in 1960 and in 1961, the Bay of Pigs invasion failed, the Soviets started the Berlin Wall, and Alan

VP-45 flew hard during the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. President Kennedy sent Army Special Forces "A Teams" to help strengthen South Vietnam's fight against Communism. The 1964 *Gulf of Tonkin Incident* was used to justify the US build-up in Vietnam which increased rapidly after 1965 and peaked at about 550,000 troops in 1968 when LBJ stepped down.

## Remembering the late 1960s & 1970's

Not many volunteered for the military during this time; I was in college from 1968-72, during anti-war demonstrations, anti-ROTC protests, and the March on Washington. I started out with 77 NROTC Midshipmen in 1968 and only 17 graduated in 1972. Most college grads avoided Vietnam via deferments (some politicians got 5 deferments); except for a few ROTC students, only 2 college grads I knew volunteered for the military: one became a KC-135 tanker pilot with SAC and one became a Marine JAAG to pay for law school.

The majority of Northeastern college grads did not serve in the Vietnam era—they let someone else go and the officer corps tipped towards more conservative areas of the US which had a long-term effect on the military. The Vietnam tragedy changed the dynamic of every 18-year-old serving the country and politicians transitioned to a "Volunteer Military" in 1973. Retired Army General David Petraeus (West Point 1974) has put it this way: "In World War II, 11.2% of the nation served in four years. During the Vietnam era, 4.3% served in twelve years. Since 2001, only 0.45% of our population have served in the Global War on Terror."

From a high of 550,000 American troops in Vietnam in 1969 (over 3 million total in military), "Vietnamization" efforts enabled the US to decrease to about 24,000 troops by late 1972, and the 1973 *Paris Peace Accords* diplomatically "ended" the war. The American public was tired of Vietnam and military spending; Service budgets shrank quickly, the US Army downsized, and thousands of combat helicopter pilots and others who had stepped-up suddenly had to transition to other

specialties or leave the military.

With the Navy downsizing, it was more difficult to get a flight slot as an NFO or pilot. There have always been a number of factors including luck, timing, and “needs of the Navy” to get through flight school. My pre-flight class in August 1975 was made-up of Naval Academy football players, Imperial Iranian Navy student pilots, and 5 Marine artillery officers (who had been drafted to be A-6 (attack jet) NFOs because they had high math scores—including one who hated airplanes.) My basic flight instructor was a fully carrier-qualified jet pilot (trained at over \$1.5million) whose class had been brought into a base theater and each given an envelope with their limited options--most were “pink slips”—so he was going to school at night to become a veterinarian.

**My first contact with VP** had been in 1973, when I was on a destroyer that docked at Subic Bay, Philippines. I was up at the Cubi Point BOQ and saw a very tired- looking crew checking in. I asked “Who are those guys?” and my friend said “They’re a P-3 crew” and I thought, “that’s what I want to be!”



*USS Coral Sea during underway replenishment.*

Later, aboard USS Coral Sea, I talked with a few P-3 pilots doing their “at sea” duty tour. Assistant Navigator LCDR Don Hickman encouraged me and I helped show LCDR Don Hefkin (later CO of VP-30/VP-19 and Commander of Wing-10) about driving the ship. Our Comm Dept Head, NFO LCDR Pete Cressy also helped me. My boss, LCDR Steve Thiel, was instrumental in working with the XO, CDR Tom Duran, and Don Hickman to get me a pilot seat in flight school at a time when the Navy was rapidly downsizing aviators after Vietnam. As it turned out, the Navy had cut

too deeply and I got caught up in “PTR (Pilot Training Rate) Pushes” in primary T-28 and advanced S-2 flight training which helped me get to a deploying P-3 squadron in 18 months.



*T-28Cs on VT-3 Line Whiting Field.*

The T-28 was a sturdy military aircraft fielded in 1949; during flight school, we were trained on WWII generation Navy aircraft. We learned a lot in a short time at Whiting Field in VT-3, which was the primary squadron dedicated to training future “multi-engine” pilots. During preflight, you wanted to see some oil--but not too much—leaking from the big 1820 cubic inch engine used on many aircraft, including the WWII B-17.

You sat up high, strapped in behind a big radial putting out around 1500 HP. The reassuring solid pulsing of 9 cylinders combined with the heat, oil, AVGAS smells, and busy radio traffic to provide a great training experience. On takeoff, you put in a lot of right rudder to counter the engine’s torque; constantly kept your outside scan going, and were always ready to do an engine failure or practice PEL (Precautionary Emergency Landing) if the instructor threw one at you.

One day, after takeoff, as we were climbing out, I had gone through the After-Takeoff procedure of closing the canopy, setting props-throttles-mixtures, etc., when an unusually friendly instructor inquired where



*Based on the S-2, a carrier based ASW aircraft, this TS-2 is on deck with wings folded.*

I was from. I said “from a farm in Upstate New York” and he then asked what we raised there. I was saying corn and alfalfa when he screamed, “*Do you ever raise any gear?*” --I put the gear up—I never forgot again.

One of our student friends at Whiting had a night engine failure and was able to put it into a field and later, out of NAS Corpus Christi, an TS-2A had a complete electrical failure at night and the instructor/ student bellied into a field. Mechanics soon hammered out the dents in the fuselage, hung new props, and the Grumman “*Iron Works*” TS-2A flew again.

Learning to fly the T-28 in formation was big step; I remember our night formation flight with the “*Fam Space*” instructor keeping an eye on 3 of us as we flew a triangular course over West Florida and South Alabama. During this period, we Student Naval Aviators started feeling we were learning more very fast - a la the firehouse method; you didn’t think about it you just did it. Because of the PTR push, I was flying 3-4 flights a day and one day up at Brewton AL, my instructor kept yelling me to “*stay on altitude 1200 feet,*” and I said “*I am on 1200 feet,*” but I wasn’t—I was so tired I was fixating on 1200 on the RPM gage.

On the 3 day 1976 Presidents’ weekend holiday, about 5 of us were told to “*finish ground school*” and we cleaned-up all our courses so we could drive down to Corpus Christi for Advanced Prop training in the TS-2A. We had to do a final cross country and we got to fly from Corpus to El Toro MCAS in Tustin California. On the way back at night, we stopped for gas at Davis Monthan AFB in Tucson and ground control taxied us for a long time—we asked again where the gas was—and they said “*Gas? We thought you were going to the Bone Yard; we have newer S-2s than yours in there!*”

1976 was the United States’ Bicentennial Year; I received my Navy wings (we owed the Navy 4 ½ years after wings) in June and checked into VP-30 at NAS Jacksonville for 5+ months of ASW tactics and flight training in the P-3C before joining VP-45 around Christmas as the squadron deployed to KEF. This was about 18

months after I came off a 7 month WestPac cruise as an OOD on *USS Coral Sea CVA-43*). During this deployment, Vietnam fell and *Coral Sea* was involved in covering the evacuation of Saigon and the SS *Mayaguez* rescue operation.



*In 1976, the “baseline” P-3C was still a new aircraft. VP-45 had received nine brand new P-3C’s in 1972 - 1973. Here are four on the ramp in JAX.*

**The P-3C** was the Navy’s top-of-the-line computerized aircraft in the Seventies; I think that at the time it cost about \$36M and was one of the most expensive aircraft in the Navy inventory. It had taken a decade of dedicated work by the best engineers in the Navy and industry to develop it into an effective long-range patrol platform to support the Fleet in taking on the growing Soviet submarine threat. The P-3C had a max gross weight of 139,760 pounds and was powered by 4 Allison T-56-14As capable of developing 4600 shaft horse power, fuel flow was about 4500 lbs./hour, and it cruised at 330 TAS. The first time I pushed the power levers forward and called “*Takeoff Horsepower*” to the Flight Engineer, I was very impressed that the turbo-props came up quickly, pushing you back in the sea... you knew that this plane had plenty of extra power, was a rugged workhorse, and would be very dependable.



*The original P-3A was derived from the commercial “Electra” aircraft developed by Lockheed.*

**Patrol Evolution.** During the 50s and 60s, the US Navy transitioned its long-range patrol mission from Martin P-5M flying boats, airships, and Lockheed P-2V *Neptunes* to the P-3A *Orion*; which was a modified Lockheed Electra L-188. In 1959, the Navy contracted with Lockheed to develop the P-3A based on their Electra commercial aircraft design. The P-3A began arriving in squadrons in 1962. The last P-3 Orion was produced in 1990 and has now been replaced by the Boeing P-8 *Poseidon*.

In 1959-60 several fatal Lockheed *Electra* crashes had given it a reputation as a deadly airplane as wings were failing due to harmonic metal fatigue. The Navy heavily modified the Electra by stiffening the wing and adding hardpoints, a “*synchrophaser*” for the propellers, a bomb bay, all the ASW equipment/antennas including a MAD boom (Magnetic Anomaly Detector), and shortening the fuselage by seven feet. The result



*A P-3 onstation with number one engine shut down for loiter.*

was the powerful P-3A (later models were the B, C, and Updates II, II.5, and III) that could take a beating down low and fly efficiently at altitude. A typical mission involved shutting down #1 engine at Top of Climb, transiting to on-station, shutting down #4 and loiter on patrol search; if descending below 2500 you had to light off #4 and if you went below 1,000 you restarted #1 engine also.

**VP Losses in Peacetime.** Many sacrifices were made, including crews lost and marriages lost or strained by steady deployments. During my tour 1976-79, five P-3s were lost from VP-11, 23, 8, 22 and VP-9 (ditched in North Pacific and most of crew rescued by Russian ship; see *The Rescue of Alfa Foxtrot 586* by Andrew

C.A. Jampoler: <http://www.orneveien.org/adak/contributors/jampoler/>

Over 40 crewmen died in these very different mishaps-- including my friend, LT Mike Hayes of VP-23; we had gotten our wings together and had had our LT



*NAF Lajes in the 1970s. This is a shot of the “Navy Side” of the USAF Base.*

wetting-down party in 1976. We were both older than our peers in Flight School: Mike was a Naval Academy grad and had been an AMO (Aviation Maintenance Officer) while I had been a SWO (Surface Warfare Officer) for 3 years. He was on a VP-23 training flight out of Lajes, Azores when it was lost on 26 April 1978.

**Why the Radar Range Knob is Really Very Important.** In 1979, a couple of our flight crews were sent from NAS JAX to NAS Bermuda for a week to augment the Brunswick squadron deployed there and to fly on a surge of Russian Yankee missile boats. It was a great chance to fly almost every day and stay off-base at a beach hotel. It was late winter and the weather was pretty bad. One day we took off into the overcast and as usual set EMCON. We had a rough ride and as we got closer to the OnStation area east of Bermuda, I asked the Sensor 3 (a senior replacement who was just flying with us on this flight to get monthly flight pay) to break EMCON, take a couple of sweeps on the radar to make sure we would, weather-wise, be OK on station. He said that it “*looked good,*” but a couple of minutes later we started picking up heavy rain, then hail, moderate turbulence, lightning and St Elmo’s fire--all followed by severe turbulence that shoved us down.

I pushed up *Max Military* power and tried to keep the wings level as the storm tried to flip us over, but we



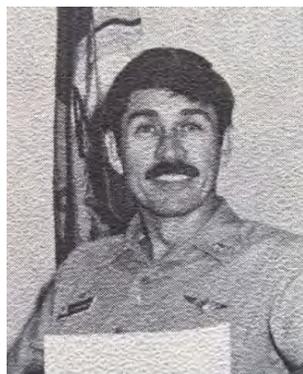
*Cumulonimbus downdraft*

were still descending extremely rapidly—I had never experienced anything like it. The co-pilot was helping me and yelling to keep the wings level while he called off altitudes; but we were at the mercy of the huge cumulonimbus we had flown into. Finally, the downdraft spit us out around 2,000 feet and I recovered. You could see the heavy hail being spit out the downdraft of the CB.

We checked to see that everyone was OK and put a ring of buoys in around the base of the CB below which of course, according to Murphy’s law, the *Yankee* was located. I asked the TACCO what the hell had gone on with the radar and he reported that the replacement Sensor 3 had taken a look ahead with the range scale set so far out that he only saw clutter in front of us—that almost killed 12 crewmen. The rugged P-3C had saved us as we were pushed down the downdraft within the shaft of a probably 40,000 foot plus CB; we had somehow survived before windshear recovery procedures had been written.

### “Shaft Horsepower 700.”

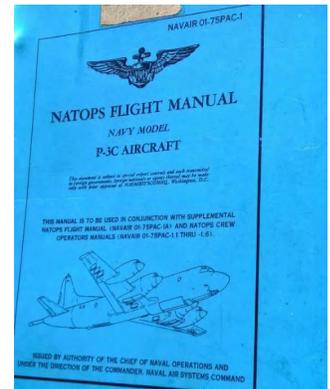
Our new XO, CDR Bob Stephenson, checked into the squadron and he was a pilot’s pilot. Bob had been a Machinist Mate, went to Pensacola as a NAVCAD, and had a load of flight experience including flying C-47s and other aircraft in Vietnam. He flew over to Bermuda to see how our detachment was going and flew with us back to JAX. About an hour out,



*CDR Stephenson*

he started talking about “one power setting landings” and whether it could actually be done and then bet me a beer that he could do it. So, during the descent, at about 14,000 feet, he said “Set Horsepower 700.” I knew he couldn’t make Runway 9 since he was still high as a kite at about 3,000 feet at the right 180. We were still about 1500 feet turning on final and I knew he couldn’t get it down, but Bob calmly said “Ask for a left 360.” I did and couldn’t believe that JAX tower approved it and Bob greased it on perfectly--he won and was the real deal! (An Instructor Flight Engineer bet me I couldn’t land without tipping over his Zippo lighter on the fuel totalizer gauge—I won).

**Boost-out Landings.** When we went through the RAG, part of the syllabus was to practice actual “boost-out” (no hydraulic assist) approaches which involved pulling in order E-R-A: the Elevator, Rudder, and Aileron handles thereby forcing you to manhandle the aircraft. A lot was on the line and more than one pilot scared his instructor crew and himself by drifting too much and it was always a relief to put those handles back in (I think in reverse order). I think the Navy wisely discontinued airborne boost-out training as it was more dangerous than it was worth.



*The P-3C version of the “Blue Sleeping Pill”*

“**Puke-us**” The P-3 Navy had embarked on a new “PQS” system (Personal Qualification System known locally as Puke-us) and we had to get extensive sign-offs for each qualification: 3P, 2P, PPC. At KEF, I often tried to pester PPCs to get PQS sign-offs; some would run away when they saw me coming to avoid “Puke-us” discussions on fun things like how the “Reverse backup valve” worked in the complex prop diagram. Such discussions required reference to complex, fold-out charts contained in the NATOPS manual...the “Blue Sleeping Pill.”

**Mad-trapping at 200 feet.** During ASW localization, you wanted to get quickly back around on top of a submarine and get a Magnetic Anomaly Detector (MAD)

needle swing from the SS-3 (Sensor 3 non-acoustic) Operator to pinpoint the target for attack. You pulled slight positive G as the bank angle increased and the co-pilot would watch closely...as the aircraft approached 30 degrees bank (the ASW-31 autopilot often dropped off at high bank angles); you kept your eyes on the horizon all the time so if the autopilot dropped off you took over and smoothly flew the plane (the crew could tell who was flying). The MAD system had to be compensated (calibrated) by flying a profile of continuous dips and rolls which were uncomfortable to the crew and pilots. These MAD Comps were a way for new PPCs to get some flight time out in the local Warning Area.

**Sigonella.** South of Mt. Etna and west of Catania, NAF I Sigonella (SIG) had been a WWII base and in 1978



*A Juliett SSG along side a Soviet submarine support ship*

Tim Davison USN (Ret.), recalls that, “NAF I near Motta Sant’Anastasia was actually a Luftwaffe weapons depot That used the train station collocated on Strada Stale 192 (SS 192) to deliver ordnance for the German fighters that flew out of the 20 some air fields in the area.



*The Italian Air Force Atlantic ASW aircraft were based with us in Sigonella.*

you could still see the “lollipops” of tarmac (with concrete poured around them later) where Italian and German fighters had been positioned. I remember Seabees pouring concrete for new sidewalks as part of the effort to upgrade NAF II which was part of NATO Base Sigonella. A former CO of Sigonella, Captain



*NAF II (shown here) was the airfield. NAF I (where we lived) was some miles away.*

All VP-ers remember that Italian GCA controllers would talk you onto the glide path and then say “Don’t-a-toucha nuthin” and if you slipped off glide path, you would hear “You are below glide path--I told you, don’t a touch a nuthin...” SIG was a “low altitude” mission as we drove around the Med at 1500 or 2500 feet on the hunt for mostly diesel submarines; almost every mission had a Ham(mamet Bay) Check to photo the Soviet wagon wheel of ships and subs.

**Night Hunting the Juliett.** Our innovative Ops Officer, Dave Bennett, worked out a set of tactics for crews to hunt the *Juliett* up-moon on many nights. The *Juliett* was a big conventional diesel boat armed with 4 nuclear capable, 300-mile range cruise missiles - a danger to our Carrier Battle Groups in the Med. Since they had to snorkel or surface at night to keep their batteries charged, Dave set up a nightly plan to hunt the Juliet using over the shoulder radar and coordinating observers to scan up-moon.

TACCO Warren Tisdale remembers “SIG operations were a lot different from those in KEF. There was considerably less long-term tracking of submarines with hot turnovers to relieving aircraft. Mostly short contact and a lot of surface search/reconnaissance. The missions

were more helter-skelter, with an anchorage check either going out or coming in, or both. Rigging ships at Hammamet and Kythira anchorages, with the occasional puckering flight near Sollum. Short detachments to Sou-da Bay, Crete. Low level and bumpy flights with a lot of surface traffic. One night we jumped a sub that was submerging right as we roared into Hammamet. We rained down buoys—but were not able to track it because we couldn't identify the sub's acoustic signature amongst all the noise. It was clear afterwards the sub essentially ran over a couple of our buoys, so at least we provided the definitive signature for that particular submarine for future reference...frustrating, though.

"Mole, my NAVCOM, did a pretty fair imitation of my reaction, pounding on the screen (sorry IFT) and yelling G-D-----mit.

"SIG was hot with a lot of flies...big flies that were not easily dissuaded. The locals were great; except for the guy hired to chip concrete off the forms used in the BOQ expansion project. He hammered rhythmically all day every weekday, which wasn't too bad unless you had flown all night and were trying to sleep, which was about 50 percent of the time. Some boredom, some anxiety, some fear and some excitement on some flights. Nice views of lava on Mt. Etna sometimes when flying back in at night."

(The Fly Trap was the one (and only) social scene in the BOQ at scenic NAF II. As usual, the Ready 2 crew stocked and tended bar enabling the Fly Trap to be a rendezvous for visiting Navy and Marine crews, MAC C-141 passengers, and anyone else passing through SIG).

**Torpedo Exercises.** "To get ready to deploy, all crews had to complete a training flight where we dropped an



exercise torpedo on an actual submarine. TORPEX training flights were great. We dropped a lot of electronic sonobuoys and electronic torpedoes on electronic submarines in the Weapons Systems Trainers. We occasionally tracked Soviet submarines in the wild, and worked with US submarines in exercises and coordinated ops. The torpedo flights, however, took you from training to close to real world ASW.

Flying against a US submarine at the AUTEK range required that the US sub employ a sound augmentation device (otherwise we would not have been able to track them as they were much quieter than the Soviet submarines). You could make the localization progression from Lofar to Difar to Active, and then, with bomb bay doors open at very low altitude, when SS3 called MAD-MAN you released the MK 46 torpedo down course—or what you had concluded was down course.

At the TACCO seat you could feel the clunk of the release. After the aircraft climbed out, the range officer could tell you the range and relative bearing between the sub and the torpedo at the drop, whether the MK 46 torpedo ran as designed, and most importantly whether it acquired the submarine; the latter was the equivalent of a kill. Flying back to JAX after a successful acquisition, you could tell your crew (and yourself) "Hey, this stuff works."



Grisha picket ship patrols Hammamet Anchorage.

**Incidents at Sea.** Hammamet was an anchorage off Tunisia that was used by Soviet submarines and sub-tenders; there were also picket ships stationed outward- usually small ships like *Grishas* (see photo previous page). The Soviet Navy also used anchorages including Kithira NW of Greece, East of Crete, and Sollum near the Egypt-Libya border. They operated extensively in the eastern Med using the port of Tartus, Syria and also worked in the Gulf of Sidra off Libya.

One day we were rigging a *Grisha* when it started training and slewing its gun at us. This was illegal according to the US-Soviet Incidents at Sea (INCSEA) Agreement which allowed a ship to slew a gun for maintenance, but it wasn't supposed to both slew and train (aim) at us.

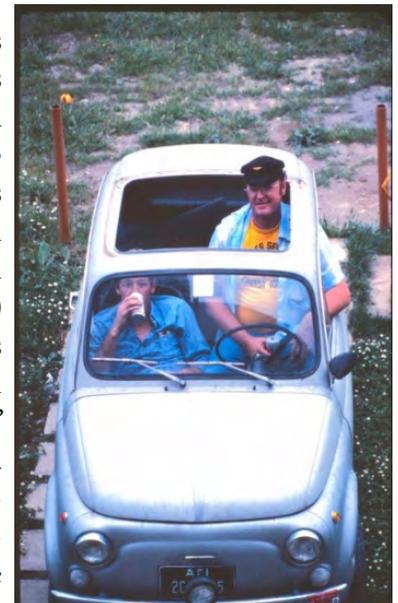
The *Grisha* fired flares at us and one went up between our Number 3 and 4 engines. When we got back to Sig and debriefed at the ASWOC, we reported the incident and said we wanted to file an INCSEA violation report. The Debriefing Officer didn't want to do the paperwork and said "But the flare didn't hit you..." and we said we were lucky that it didn't and so we did file a report...just another incident in the long Cold War.

**Etna.** Mount Etna erupted a few times on our deployments to SIG. Maintenance had to "walnut shell" (run pulverized walnut shells) through the engines in order to clean the turbine blades of Mt. Etna ash. We were also very concerned about corrosion control of aircraft surfaces the bird baths at the end of each flight helped control the ash pumice.



Water Spouts

**Crew cars.** Probably the most dangerous thing we ever did was ride in crew cars which tended to be beat-up small old Italian cars which we bought from departing squadron crews for around 200 bucks. It took full days to buy the registration paper at the "Tabac" (Tobacco) shop (I kid you not), take the Italian driving test, get licenses, and transfer the registration. Mechanical problems, navigating small roads, and having questionable designated drivers (below) combined for risks.



Beat-up small old Italian cars

**"The Most Exciting Landing Ever at Gib."** According to RAF Hawker Hunter pilots who sent a note over to our PPC at their bar: "Congratulations on the most exciting landing of the Year! No one has landed beyond the Red Line and not gone in the drink—the crash boats were called out and we expected you to go in." We did have just enough room to turn around--as a new 2P, I had told the senior PPC to "Wave off" as he floated down the runway, but he continued the landing.

**Water Spouts.** On one mission, we were flying at night during miserable weather with a lot of turbulence and the Sensor 3 reported intense snaky radar echoes. We just managed to pick out and dodge water spouts which seemed to be sprouting from cloud bottoms.

**Names.** A crew took off from KEF for a "good deal" 3 day stay at the NATO base in Bodo, Norway. The PPC made the takeoff, got to top of climb, went back to sleep in the rest racks in the back. He woke up as the plane started de-



A rare sighting of "The Mole" in Service Dress Blues.

scending and sat on the radar console for the approach. “This place has a lot of WWII Hangars and snow just like Kef; hey, look there are some of our P-3s here, too.” What the PPC didn’t know was they had a mechanical failure and returned to KEF, but he hadn’t figured it out and so he instantly became “Geographic Jack.”

A new officer had just checked into the squadron and at a squadron party he introduced himself as “I’m Robert-don’t call me Bob” so for 3 years he was “Robert-don’t call me Bob.”

When someone mentioned a foreign place they had been to, a new guy said “I’ve been there,” so he soon became “BenThere.” When Mike Olenick checked on-board, of course it didn’t take long for him to become “The Mole.”

**The Mole’s Liaison with the Air Force.** *“At the end of a Sig deployment, LtJg Mole, VP-45’s Security Manager, was given the high honor and distinction of being the last navigator out of Sig. Mole had to verify and burn the squadron’s extraneous crypto allotment. So he went over to the Fly Trap (BOQ bar) and grabbed 2 “volunteers” (including me) to witness his destruction of many crypto remnants. Mole recalls: “As Security Manager, Mole had to accompany the squadron’s pallets which included classified material back to the states via the USAF Military Airlift Command transport. It is important to note that this plane was entirely dedicated to returning the Squadron’s gear to JAX via Rota with only 2 passengers, Mole and a Yeoman. The C-141 was to depart Sigonella and proceed to NAS Rota Spain for a layover. Mole made all arrangements to store the classified material pallet and highly classified material (briefcase handcuffed to his wrist) at Rota for the evening. Upon arriving at the aircraft in Sig, he was told the plane had an “issue” and had to fly to Frankfurt Air Base for maintenance before heading to JAX.*

*About an hour after takeoff, Mole went to the cockpit to see what was wrong with the aircraft. The pilot seat was empty, the copilot was looking at a chart trying to figure where the plane was and the Flight Engineer was reading a “Qui” adult magazine. He asked the co-pilot what was wrong with the aircraft and was told the radar was acting up. Upon observing a normally operating radar presentation, he asked them for the real reason: the 141*

*crew had spent the previous night in Rota and wanted to stay at Frankfurt with a better BOQ and food. Mole explained the pain that caused since the pallet and brief cases needed special storage, off the aircraft. He was assured Frankfurt was alerted.”*



*Mole questions the “faulty radar” as the C-141 makes the turn toward Frankfurt.*

(Author’s Note: One day I asked the NS Rota Spain BOQ clerk if the 8 air conditioners on the second deck were for VIPs and he said “Sir, were not supposed to tell you all this, but those are for the Air Force C-141 MAC crews—they won’t stay here without air conditioning...”and they wouldn’t stay at the new Navy BOQ at Sig either; they had their priorities.)

(USAF C-130 Hercules pilot Steve Walsworth comment: “I loved going to Sig. Mt Etna always seemed to have some lava flow going on. At night, it was really cool looking. Sig was another place those C-141 toads screwed up for us. Billeting would send us downtown because of all the billeting complaints those jerks would file on them. The driving off base to a hotel would cut into our off-duty beer drinking and pizza eating time by 2-3 hours depending on traffic. Finally, the Navy got smart and would let the 130 guys sign a billeting waiver to stay on base. The 141 toads were Primadonnas and the C5 guys were even worse. I was a C-141 maintenance officer for 2-yrs and what a bunch of babies.”)

*”Upon landing at Frankfurt, security personal with rifles met Mole and took him with his handcuffed-attached briefcase to a secure facility and removed the pallet for storage in a secure hanger. Mole was taken to a class B BOQ (as the Air Force crew went to a class A facility) and didn’t reserve a room for him.*



*No one who has deployed to Sigonella could forget Mount Etna!*

Early in the evening, Mole called the female co-pilot and asked when takeoff was scheduled for the next day. Although she provided an answer, the Mole would regret this the next day. The next morning, Mole went to the secure hanger to check on the secure pallet. It was gone—replaced by a coffin. A ton of cruise boxes with at least Confidential material was missing, on his watch! A facility member finally showed up and stated the squadron pallet was moved to another area.

Mole had a driver take him to the aircraft. The main



*Our ASW adversaries in the Med.*

cabin was opened and he proceeded to settle down on the “webbing” first class (only class) seat. The plane captain (E-4) met him and said he was in trouble because he: “Didn’t formally check in at the terminal, had crossed

the dreaded flight line security Yellow Line and, finally, was told he could have been shot. The Aircraft Commander then proceeded to dress down Mole for “breaking crew rest” by contacting his co-pilot and told him she could have declared broken crew rest and delayed the takeoff by 2 hours. The rest of the trip was uneventful, but Mole had learned a great deal about the Air Force and the importance of their crew rest.”

\*\*\* Mike Olenick (“The Mole”) was a Miami of Ohio NROTC grad who, after retiring from the Navy, worked in the telecommunications industry.

“We were there. We were Patrol Squadron FORTY-FIVE. Four hundred individuals bound by a common goal; Freedom for all mankind. Those who have never faced the challenge...the reality...the loneliness will never understand. For who knows better the price of peace, than those who are willing to give their lives for it...”



## Remembering Those Shot Down

The Cold War affected millions of service personnel and their families over almost half a century; and many countries (including our professional adversaries in the Soviet Union) sacrificed their blood and treasure to maintain some balance of military power and ensure peace during a turbulent and dangerous time. While Americans at home were enjoying the increasing

post-WWII prosperity, our defense was being guaranteed by those millions of young men and women who were serving on US bases, remote outposts, and manning the ships and planes around the world.

Way before intelligence satellites, Air Force and Navy reconnaissance and patrol aircraft often flew "In Harm's Way," hem-stitching the Soviet, Red Chinese, and North Korean coasts in international airspace, on patrols and intelligence-gathering missions. An Air Force RB-47 actually snuck 400 miles into the USSR and returned, but unknown to many Americans, hundreds of Navy and Air Force crewmen were shot down, killed, captured, or injured during the Cold War.

Several friends died on "peacetime" Cold War military flying operations and while I had some sense of the sacrifices made during the Cold War, I was shocked to learn the actual magnitude of these losses. According to *VP International's Book of Remembrance*: "Since 1947, there have been **1149** Americans casualties" on Navy patrol missions; some patrol (and VQ) crews were shot down by Soviet, Chinese or North Korean interceptors; we need to remember them and their families:

- "April 1950 VP-26 PB-4 Shot down by Russian fighter while patrolling international waters of the Baltic Sea **10** killed
- November 1951 VP-6 P-2V Shot down by Russian fighter aircraft over international waters off the Sea of Japan **10** killed
- July 1952 VP-731 PBM-5 Attacked by Chinese fighters, off West Korea **2** killed
- January 1953 VP-22 P-2V Badly damaged by AA fire from Swatow Island (Red China) that it was forced to ditch **2** killed
- September 1954 VP-19 P-2V Shot down by Russian fighter. Ditched, the crew survived except for the Navigator **1** killed" (from *VP International* <http://www.vpinternational.ca/BOR/US.htm> )
- In June 1955, a Navy VP-9 P-2V was attacked by Soviet Mig-15s over the Bering Sea and managed to crash-land on St. Laurence Island, Alaska; the crew survived.
- In August 1956, a Chinese fighter shot down a Navy VQ-1 P-4M at night 32 miles off the coast of Wenchow, China and all **16** crewmen were killed
- In April 1969, a Navy VQ-1 EC-121 was shot down by North Korean MiG-17s 90 miles off the coast of Korea.

**31** crew members were killed.

- 1955 Navy VP-9 [http://www.vpnavy.org/vp9\\_mis-hap.html](http://www.vpnavy.org/vp9_mis-hap.html) 1960 RB-47 National Museum of the US Air Force.

Some examples Air Force casualties include:

- In January **1953**, Soviet fighters shot down a B-29 which was dropping leaflets in Manchuria. 11 of the 14-man crew parachuted out and survived but were imprisoned in China and **not released until 1956**.
- In 1955, Soviet MiG-15s shot down a USAF RB-47 near the Kamchatka peninsula and the crew were all killed.
- In July 1960, An ERB-47 was shot down in the Barents Sea north of the Kola Peninsula; 4 of the 6 crewmen perished and 2 were held by the Soviets for many months. [http://sw.propwashgang.org/shootdown\\_list.html](http://sw.propwashgang.org/shootdown_list.html)
- In September 1983, as USAF RC-135s monitored an upcoming Soviet missile test, a fighter shot down a Boeing 747, Korean Air Lines Flight 007, which had strayed off its airway and flown over the Kamchatka peninsula; 269 passengers/crew perished.

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## About The Author:



Don Stanton was commissioned through the Cornell University Navy ROTC program. Prior to Flight Training, he served off Vietnam on USS *R.B. Anderson* (DD-786) and later aboard USS *Coral Sea* (CVA-43) as

an Officer of the Deck (Fleet) during the evacuation of Saigon and SS Mayaguez Rescue in 1975. He flew as a P-3C anti-submarine Patrol Plane/Mission Commander/Instructor Pilot deployed to the Atlantic & Mediterranean in VP-45 (1976-79) and VP-49 (1984-86); served as a T-44 flight instructor in VT-28; on the Navy International and Office of Secretary of Defense staffs, and retired in 1992.

Don later flew aircraft ranging from the B-747 to the 767 and served as vice chairman of an airline pilots' legislative committee. He was Aviation Advisor to the Secretary of Transportation and served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Transportation Policy working with the US Transportation Command and industry stakeholders. In 2016 Don received the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service and currently teaches part-time for the University of Colorado-Denver.

Some Recommendations to learn more about the Cold War:

- *Strategic Air Command*, Jimmy Stewart 1955
- *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, Peter Sellers, Slim Pickens 1964
- *The Bedford Incident*, Richard Widmark 1965
- *Hell in a Very Small Place-the Siege of Dien Bien Phu*, Bernard Fall 1967
- "Korea - The Unknown War" PBS WGBH 1980
- *Vietnam-a History*, Stanley Kornow 1983
- *Chickenhawk* (Vietnam "Huey" pilot memories) Robert Mason 1983
- *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age*, John Newhouse 1988
- *Command and Control: Nuclear weapons, the Damascus accident, and the Illusion of safety*, Eric Schlosser 2013