

1996-2005

New Aircraft:

2001: The first KC-130Js arrive at MCAS Cherry Point and assignment to VMGRT-253.

Important Dates:

December 16-19, 1998: Operation Desert Fox includes strikes by *Enterprise* aircraft against Iraqi facilities.

March 24, 1999: Operation Allied Force begins as NATO's aerial campaign against Yugoslavian Serbs. USS *Theodore Roosevelt's* (CVN-71) CVW-8 launches more than 4,200 sorties.

June 25, 1999: The A-4 retires from the training command after 30 years of training naval aviators.

November 1999: The MV-22 Osprey begins operational evaluation as does the FA-18E/F Super Hornet with newly established VFA-122.

January 19, 2000: The Navy decides to restore relations with the Tailhook Association, which were suspended after the 1991 scandal.

April 1, 2001: A Chinese J-8 fighter collides with an EP-3E over international waters. The U.S. crew lands their damaged aircraft on Hainan Island, where they are interned for two weeks.

September 11, 2001: Terrorists hijack four airliners and fly three of them into the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon. The fourth aircraft goes down in Pennsylvania. In response to the 9/11 attacks, American forces strike Afghanistan to begin Operation Enduring Freedom.

March 2002: The first fleet FA-18E Super Hornet squadron takes its aircraft into combat for the first time over Iraq.

February 2003: The space shuttle *Columbia* disintegrates during its return descent, killing the crew, including three Navy

members. Operation Iraqi Freedom begins with eventually five carrier battle groups involved. The Marines used "Harrier carriers," amphibious assault ships (LHDs), which replaced all their helicopters with AV-8Bs.

This period saw some of the most intense combat operations involving naval aviation since Vietnam, against unexpected enemies in Yugoslavia and the Balkans.

The Navy and Marine Corps brought in new aircraft, decommissioned squadrons and established new ones, and considered various programs to make the community safer amidst all the real-world operations. It was not an easy task. One program, Operational Risk Management, considers mission necessity and aircraft and aircrew availability and readiness to perform the mission.

Within a month of September 11, 2001, American forces struck Afghanistan, the heart of the Taliban's seat of power. Naval aviation sent strike groups of FA-18s and F-14s, supported by EA-6Bs, E-2Cs, and shore-based communities, deep into the mountainous strongholds with devastating effect. Two years later, America led the reconstituted alliance of 1991 against Iraq, storming into Baghdad and removing leadership from power.

Carrier strike groups received their share of attention, and it was not unusual for returning aircrews to be interviewed as they left their cockpits, their flight suits sweaty and their hair stuck to their faces from the long missions they just had flown. One has to wonder if the reporters truly understood what the crews had gone through—the training and the concerns for safely flying their mission and trapping back aboard the ship, often at night, or in the shadowy light of dawn.

Despite the overwhelming speed and might that echoed the victory of 1991, a bitter insurgency keeps America and the alliance fighting an undeclared war, supported by Navy and Marine aircraft and crews.

One air-wing leader later observed that in the 12 years following Desert Storm, we had availed ourselves of improvements in weapons technology and resulting accuracy and lethality. There had been a corresponding reduction in sortie count as well, because it now took fewer aircraft and crewmen to destroy a target. The culture of safety, he also noted, was enunciated by leaders. People "grow up" watching what their squadron COs and CAG do.

To a degree, the same can be said about what people see in print, especially in such publications as *Approach*, which serves as a showcase or platform for people to share their experiences with others. We can all learn from mistakes, ours and others, or from how someone else handled an emergency we might someday face. In the 50 years that *Approach* has cruised in squadron ready rooms ashore and afloat, it always has been a magazine created and maintained by you in the cockpits past and present. We trust the next 50 years will see that record sustained.

As of September 30, 2005, the 2005 aviation mishap rate was 1.60 per 100,000 flight hours. The mishap-rate reduction challenge continues.

Naval Aviation Mishaps

