

How to Trace Squadron Lineage

THE LINEAGE AND HISTORY of U.S. naval aviation squadrons has been a source of confusion since the birth of naval aviation in 1911. Much of this confusion arose from the terminology used by the Navy, the lack of a consistent policy in selecting the alphanumeric designations for squadrons; constantly reusing the same letter and numeric designations; and the many establishments, redesignations and disestablishments of aviation squadrons.

When dealing with a squadron's lineage, the only correct terms to use are establishment, disestablishment and redesignation. The terms commissioning and establishment have been used interchangeably for years and that is incorrect. Only ships are commissioned, decommissioned and receive commissioning pennants. Squadrons have establishment and disestablishment ceremonies.

A unit's history and lineage begins when it is established and ends at the time it is disestablished. Determining a squadron's "family tree" may seem cut and dried, but that is not the case. A squadron may undergo numerous redesignations during the period between its establishment and disestablishment. A newly established squadron bearing the same designation of a unit that had previously existed may carry on the traditions of the old organization but it cannot claim the history or lineage of the previous unit. The same is true of U. S. Navy ships and, thus, the rationale for such a policy becomes apparent. For example, *Ranger* (CV 61) is the seventh ship to bear the name *Ranger* and may carry on the traditions of the previous six ships. *Ranger* (CV 61) is obviously not the same Continental Navy Ship *Ranger* commanded by Captain John Paul Jones during the War of Independence. The history of *Ranger* (CV 61) begins with its commissioning date, not with the commissioning date of the first *Ranger*.

The most recent squadron with the designation Fighter Squadron One (VF-1) was established 1 October 1972 and disestablished 1 October 1993. It was the seventh squadron in the Navy to be designated VF-1. This squadron is not the same VF-1 that used the designation for the first time in 1922. Designations, like ship's names, are reused again and again. If there is a break in the active status of a unit designation as a result of a disestablishment, then there is no connection between the units bearing the same designation.

Another common problem area involves squadron

insignia. The lineage or history of a squadron cannot be traced using only its insignia, because the same insignia may have been adopted and approved for official use by more than one squadron during different time frames. The insignia of a disestablished squadron may be officially approved for use by another squadron but this does not confer upon the new squadron the right to the previous unit's history and lineage. The following outline of the Jolly Roger insignia is an example of the confusion that results if one attempts to trace the lineage and history of a squadron insignia without considering other factors.

VF-17 was established on 1 January 1943, and during World War II it produced an outstanding record as a fighter squadron. The Jolly Roger insignia for VF-17 was adopted during World War II. On 15 November 1946, all Navy squadrons were redesignated and VF-17 became VF-5B. Subsequently, it was redesignated VF-61 on 28 April 1948, and then disestablished on 15 April 1959. Commander Hoppe was the Commanding Officer of VF-61 when it was disestablished. The Jolly Roger insignia had been used by VF-17/VF-5B/VF-61 from 1943 until 15 April 1959.

On 2 July 1955, VA-86 was established and on the same day was redesignated VF-84. This squadron was equipped with the FJ Fury and adopted the nickname Vagabonds. An insignia consisting of a lightning bolt striking the world in the area of Norfolk, with a sword behind the bolt, was approved on 27 September 1955. The squadron operated under this name and insignia until it replaced the FJs with F8U Crusaders in 1959. Commander Hoppe assumed command of VF-84 two days after the disestablishment of VF-61, the Jolly Roger squadron. He initiated the request to have VF-84 adopt the old Jolly Roger insignia, which had been used by VF-61 and was no longer active. This request was approved by CNO on 1 April 1960. There is no direct connection between the former Jolly Roger squadron (VF-17/VF-5B/VF-61) and VF-84, which adopted the Jolly Roger insignia. To further complicate a review of the records, there have been other squadrons with the designation VF-84. During World War II, a VF-84 was established on 1 May 1944, and disestablished 8 October 1945. Naval air reserve squadron VF-921 was called to active duty 1 February 1951, and was redesignated VF-84 on 4 February 1954. This squadron then became VA-86 on 2 July 1955. This occurred on the same day, the current Jolly Roger

squadron was established as VA-86 and immediately redesignated VF-84. Neither of these two VF-84 squadrons had any connection with the original Jolly Rogers. Thus, the present VF-84 operating with the insignia and title of Jolly Rogers can lay claim to the traditions of VF-17, VF-5B and VF-61, if it wishes to do so, but can only claim a history which commenced on 2 July 1955, and it is not a direct descendant of the original Jolly Rogers squadron.

A squadron's history and lineage covers only the period during which a unit is officially declared active (established by CNO), has personnel assigned to it, and is listed in the Naval Aeronautical Organization. When a squadron is disestablished, its history and lineage ends. If a squadron is redesignated while it is active, the lineage and history of the unit is carried on by the newly redesignated squadron. The following is an example of what occurs when a squadron is redesignated and its lineage and history remain unbroken.

The current VFA-25 was originally established as Torpedo Squadron 17 (VT-17) on 1 January 1943. On 15 November 1946, VT-17 was redesignated VA-6B and carried this designation until 27 April 1948, when it was redesignated VA-65. On 1 July 1959, VA-65 was redesignated VA-25 and the unit remained Attack

Squadron 25 until it was redesignated VFA-25 on 1 July 1983. The history and lineage of the present VFA-25 may be traced to 1 January 1943, because there was no break in active duty status of the squadron, even though its designation changed four times.

The current VFA-106 provides an example of what happens when a squadron is disestablished and then, years later, the same number is used again. This squadron was established at NAS Cecil Field on 27 April 1984. VFA-106 adopted the old insignia of VA-106 and had it officially approved. The squadron may carry on the traditions of the old VA-106, but it cannot trace its lineage and history back to VA-106. The list of commanding officers for VA-106 is not part of the list of commanding officers for VFA-106. The history of VA-106 came to an end on 7 November 1969, when it was disestablished and its personnel were transferred to other duty stations. At this time, VA-106 was removed from the active list in the Naval Aeronautical Organization.

Appendix 6 in this book will provide the lineage listing for all squadrons that have been assigned the VA, VA(AW), VAH, VA(HM), VAK, VAL, VAP, and VFA designations.