

Dictionary of American Naval Aviation Squadrons

Volume I

*The History of VA, VAH, VAK, VAL, VAP
and VFA Squadrons*

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About the Author

ROY A. GROSSNICK is currently a historian and head of the Naval Aviation History Office, a branch of the Naval Historical Center. He graduated from Wisconsin State University, Stevens Point, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in history in 1970. In 1972, Mr. Grossnick completed a Master of Arts in history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He served in the Navy on active duty for ten years. Following his separation from military service, Mr. Grossnick worked at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. In 1980, he assumed the historian position in the Naval Aviation History Office. He has written numerous articles for *Naval Aviation News* magazine and was the author of the monograph *Kite Balloons to Airships . . . the Navy's Lighter-than-Air Experience*, Volume 4 in a commemorative collection published in 1986 to mark the 75th anniversary of naval aviation.



Mr. Grossnick resides in Chevy Chase, Maryland, with his wife, Mary, and daughter Maki.

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Foreword

GREAT CREDIT IS DUE TO ROY GROSSNICK and his expert staff in the Naval Historical Center's Aviation History Branch for initiating a new publication series entitled the *Dictionary of American Naval Aviation Squadrons*. The first volume of that series, which we are now publishing, includes approximately 140 histories and other data covering every squadron in the attack (VA) and strike fighter (VFA) communities from the time the first of these commands (VA-35) was established in 1934. This publication may be compared to the *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, a nine-volume compilation of individual ship histories published by the Naval Historical Center between 1959 and 1991. Now, at long last, a basic reference work is under preparation that provides similar data for aviation commands.

Subsequent volumes in this series will cover other components of naval aviation. At the present time, the Aviation History Branch is preparing a follow-on volume containing histories of all patrol squadrons of the U.S. Navy. This task is in addition to the many other duties that office handles, including the writing of arti-

cles for *Naval Aviation News* and responding to an increasingly heavy load of official and unofficial requests for information on all aspects of aviation history.

History is a useful subject for the Navy for several reasons. Insofar as it represents the sum total of the Navy's experience, it is an essential subject for study by naval professionals. History also is a means of giving an account to the American people of the activities of their Navy. Finally, since history allows naval personnel to learn about the origins, achievements, and traditions of their commands and of the Navy as a whole, it is a powerful means to promote naval morale. The Navy's historians publish the first volume with all of these purposes in mind. We hope this volume will be of interest and use to the active-duty Navy and to many other individuals interested in this nation's rich naval heritage.

Dean C. Allard
Director of Naval History

Preface

THE *DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN NAVAL AVIATION SQUADRONS*, the first of a multivolume series, provides a brief history, by community, of every squadron the Navy has established since the evolution of the squadron concept in the post-World War I era. The information and format selected to tell the story of each squadron was developed from a pattern of common reference questions. The nature of the squadron data lends itself to a variety of formats for most entries in the squadron histories instead of a straight narrative style. The dictionary, written primarily for use as a reference work, states concise facts about each squadron that provide a better understanding of the contributions made by naval aviation squadrons in service to their country.

Naval aviation is primarily a twentieth century development and has become an important element of U.S. sea power. It is part of the technological revolution that has been the hallmark of the twentieth century. The aircraft, weapons systems and associated technical equipment, combined with the men and women assigned to the squadrons, are instrumental to its success.

Each squadron history begins with a lineage section that starts with the date of establishment. It also includes any redesignations and disestablishment date if applicable. The squadron's establishment date may be equated to a ship's commissioning and the history for a squadron or ship begins on that date. When a squadron is redesignated, there is no break in the history of that squadron. The history of a squadron covers the period from its establishment to its disestablishment, regardless of how many redesignations it undergoes. Redesignations can cause confusion when tracing the lineage of a squadron. For more information on how to trace squadron lineages, please refer to Appendix 5.

A short description and photograph for all officially approved insignia used by a squadron follows the lineage section. The chronology narrates the squadron's important operational events and developments. The

remaining six sections pertain to the evolutionary history of the squadron and includes listings of home port assignments, commanding officers, aircraft assignments, overseas deployments, air wing assignments and major unit awards.

This first volume covers the attack and strike fighter communities and includes VA (attack squadron), VAH (heavy attack squadron), VAK (tactical aerial refueling squadron), VAL (light attack squadron), VAP (heavy photographic squadron) and VFA (strike fighter squadron). Although VAK and VAP did not have a primary mission of offensive and defensive air-to-surface operations, they are included here because these squadrons operated attack-designated planes, such as the AJ-2 and the A-3 and its derivatives. The squadron histories in this volume cover only those squadrons that are currently designated VA or VFA or those that had the VA, VAH, VAK, VAL, VAP and VFA designations when they were disestablished. Any attack squadron redesignated VF, VS, RVAH, VAQ or VAW that did not revert back to VA is not in this volume. The lineage listing in Appendix 6 provides a cross reference list for all squadrons that may have had the VA, VA(AW), VAH, VA(HM), VAK, VAL, VAP and VFA designation.

Reserve squadron histories begin in 1970 following the reorganization of the Naval Air Reserve Force. Prior to that time reserve air squadrons were not permanently assigned aircraft. During weekend drills they used aircraft from their local naval air station. This pre-1970 organizational system, combined with the fact that these squadrons provided no permanent historical records, makes it difficult to trace its activities. Hence, histories on reserve squadrons prior to 1970 cover only those squadrons called to active duty and assigned their own aircraft.

Histories for active squadrons cover the period from establishment up through 1990, an arbitrary cutoff date. If a squadron was redesignated or disestablished after 1990, its history is updated to its redesignation or disestablishment date.

Most illustrations used in the book are official U.S. Navy photographs unless otherwise identified. If available, a photograph is included for each major type of aircraft operated by a squadron.

Extensive appendices not only provide additional statistical material but also help to clarify or explain the Navy's unique organization and use of acronyms or designations.

When drafting a reference work with such an extensive range of data, it is almost impossible to prevent errors. An exhaustive effort was made to check the

compilation of material presented in this book. When different sets of records or sources provided conflicting dates, I attempted to select the most accurate one based on my research. In some cases only a specific year could be determined. As the writer and major compiler of the data for this volume, I accept full responsibility for any mistakes or errors of fact or misinterpretations that may have occurred in the book, and I welcome any corrections.

Roy A. Grossnick

Acknowledgments

I CONCEIVED THIS BOOK AFTER eight years of working in the Naval Aviation History Office. A common request received by the office was for a complete history of a particular squadron. Realizing the need for a history of all naval aviation squadrons prompted the development of a format that would meet the requirements posed by the Navy and most people requesting information on a squadron. Using the *Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* as an example of an excellent primary reference source, I patterned my approach along lines similar to that series.

I am very grateful for the guidance and support provided by many individuals and organizations that were instrumental in making this book possible. The initial support I received from Captain Steven U. Ramsdell, USN (Ret.), former Director, Naval Aviation History and Publications Division, in getting this project off the ground was one of the keys to the successful completion of the book. He provided valuable comments in his reviews of the draft histories. His successors, Commander Stephen R. Silverio, USN (Ret.) and Commander Michael S. Lipari, continued in his footsteps, providing review recommendations as well as support for the project.

The personnel in the Naval Aviation History Office, Ms. Gwen Rich, Ms. Judith Walters and Mr. Steven Hill, were my prime supporters in writing the book. Special thanks go to Mr. John M. Elliott, retired historian from the office, for his recommendations, and providing the aircraft line drawings for Appendix 1, as well as other assistance in getting the book ready for publication. The staff from the *Naval Aviation News* Branch, filled the editorial role. The manuscript was reviewed several times by Mrs. Sandy Russell and Ms. Joan A. Frasher. Mr. Charles C. Cooney provided design support for the squadron format, as well as extensive photographic support.

I would also like to recognize Naval Historical Center offices that made their records available. First, and foremost, was the Operational Archives Branch. Mrs. Kathleen M. Lloyd and members of her Research and Reference Section, as well as Mrs. Judith W. Short, were always willing to make that extra effort to find the documents I needed for the book. Mr. John C. Reilly and

the Ships' Histories Branch was always there to provide documentation regarding a particular carrier. The staff of the Navy Department Library was particularly helpful when I reviewed their collection of cruise books. The Photographic Section of the Curator Branch, particularly Mr. Edwin C. Finney, Jr., was always responsive to my needs for particular aircraft photographs. The services provided by Ms. Sandra J. Doyle, the Naval Historical Center's senior editor, are also appreciated.

The advice, information and comments offered by personnel outside the Naval Historical Center warrant special attention. Mr. Harold Andrews, Captain Rosario (Zip) Rausa, USN (Ret.), and Captain Kenneth L. Coskey, USN (Ret.), reviewed sections of the manuscript and provided valuable recommendations. A very special thank you goes to Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence, USN (Ret.), a member of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Committee on Naval History, for reviewing the complete manuscript. Mr. Robert Lawson, past editor of *The Hook* magazine, has lent encouragement over the past six years and provided many photographs from his collection. Mr. Duane Kasulka, as well as many other individuals, also contributed photographs from their collections.

Dr. William J. Armstrong, historian for the Naval Air Systems Command, compiled and drafted the manuscript on aircraft data for Appendix 1. When writing the history of naval aviation, it is imperative that the technical aspects are included with the operational history. His contributions in Appendix 1 will help to amplify and clarify information regarding the specific aircraft operated by the Navy's aviation squadrons.

I would like to express my thanks to my wife, Mary, and daughter, Maki, for helping to assemble the book during its last stages before publication. I owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. John Grier, a design and typesetting specialist from the Government Printing Office, for his efforts in getting the book ready for the printer. For those I have not mentioned by name, let me say that your contributions are appreciated and are not forgotten.

Roy A. Grossnick