



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
CARRIER AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING SQUADRON
ONE HUNDRED TWENTY ONE
FPO NEW YORK 09501

1978

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From: Commanding Officer, Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron
ONE HUNDRED TWENTY ONE
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-502)

Subj: Command History for 1978

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B

Encl: (1) Command Organization and Summary of Operations

- (2) April 1978 POR
- (3) May 1978 Whole Tail Report
- (4) November 1978 POR
- (5) January 1979 AEW Excellence Nomination

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (5) are submitted for subject report.

A. J. Murphy
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Copy to:
Director of Naval History

Declassified on 31 December 1985

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I. COMMAND ORGANIZATION

A. Squadron Evolution

1. The history of Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWENTY ONE (VAW-121) began in the years immediately following World War II. An experimental squadron was established in December 1946 utilizing the Grumman "Avenger" with an attached radome. This aircraft was soon replaced by the Airborne Early Warning (AEW) version of the Douglas "Skyraider". The "Skyraider" was the primary AEW aircraft in July 1958 when the rudimentary AEW forces in the Fleet were consolidated into two squadrons VAW-1 and VAW-2 located on the west coast and east coast respectively. VAW-2 originally based at Norfolk, Virginia, was soon relocated to Quonset Point, Rhode Island as Composite Squadron Twelve (VC-12). A basic organization of one parent squadron with numerous detachments operating aboard east coast carriers was established. The squadron continued to operate the "Skyraider" until January 1960 when the first WF-2 "TRACER" (Willy Fudd) was introduced to the squadron, redesignated now as VAW-12. The squadron moved to Norfolk, Va., in 1962 where it continued to grow. In 1966, the first E-2A HAWKEYE arrived and it became apparent that with two different aircraft, the Hawkeye and the Willy Fudd (redesignated E-1B), in addition to over one thousand officers and men, VAW-12 had simply grown too large. Consequently, in April 1967 Carrier Airborne Early Warning Wing TWELVE was established, with overall command of east coast AEW squadrons. VAW-12 was redesignated VAW-121, with control of all east coast E-1 aircraft. Separate E-2 squadrons and a training squadron were also established.

2. VAW-121 continued to operate the E-1B with detachments aboard anti-submarine and attack carriers until July 1973, when they disestablished their last "Det" and formed a single squadron operating exclusively in the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (CV-42). In July 1975, VAW-121 commenced transition to the E-2C and flew its last E-1B into retirement. It became the first fleet squadron to receive the new ARPS (Advanced Radar Processing System) version of the aircraft with which it deployed in January 1978 aboard USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN-69). The deployment was the squadron's first as a E-2 Hawkeye squadron and marked its initial entry into Carrier Air Wing SEVEN as a permanent member.

3. The Commanding Officer, CARAEWRON ONE TWO ONE during 1978 was Commander David E. BEYMAN, USN, who assumed command of the squadron 23 November 1977. Under his leadership and that of LCDR Andrew J. MURPHY, Executive Officer, the squadron has established an enviable reputation for performance and professionalism.

II. SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS

A. CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

1. After a long two and one-half year transition period from the E-1B to the E-2C, VAW-121 joined CVW-7 and deployed aboard USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN-69) on 5 January 1978. This deployment, intended primarily to exercise and evaluate the ship's systems, provided the squadron with an excellent opportunity to train as a member of an air wing in a fleet environment, and to evaluate the new ARPS weapon system at sea. The squadron deployed with four (4) pre-Naval Test and Evaluation (NTE) configured E-2C (ARPS) aircraft.

Major exercises during the January thru March deployment enclosure (2), were as follows:

a) 8 January - 1 February: ISE/INSURV in the ISE AFWR off Roosevelt Roads, P.R. After refresher CARQUALS, squadron operations were directed solely at Air Intercept Control (AIC), range clearance, and coordination for bombing runs at the Vieques target area. During this short operating period, VAW-121 amassed over 650 AIC's and all NFO's requalified in AIC. Lastly, during IKE's INSURV, E-2's controlled F-4 Phantom aircraft low altitude raids against IKE; and provided long range radar detection checks and Link 11 operational evaluations.

b) 19 - 26 February: ISE/READEX 1-78 off Roosevelt Roads. VAW-121 was tasked with AIC and numerous strike control missions. As a member of the ORANGE FORCES the squadron vectored raid aircraft against the BLUE TASK FORCE, and provided range surveillance for the BLUE FORCE'S SINKEX and surface to air missile exercises.

c) 15 - 19 March: Exercise SHAMROCK in the JAX OPAREA. This operating period encompassed a Combined Weapons Training Exercise (CWTE) for the Commander-in-Chief of the United States, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, and other distinguished guests aboard the EISENHOWER. VAW-121 was tasked with airborne early warning, strike control, and AIC throughout the exercise.

This initial deployment as an E-2C squadron proved to be highly educational and extremely successful. The squadron developed the teamwork necessary to effectively and safely operate the E-2C off a carrier deck. The squadron maintained a sortie completion rate of 95% and an Operational Readiness factor of 72% for the January to March period. These marks were attained despite minimal spare component support and intermediate repair capability aboard the EISENHOWER. Of note is the fact that only 4% of squadron total personnel had previous E-2 experience and 80% of the enlisted personnel had never been aboard a carrier. This inexperience was quickly overcome by the outstanding performance from all personnel.

2. During the period from 1 April to 31 July, VAW-121 worked primarily from their homebase at NAS Norfolk, VA. The squadron

participated in numerous missions throughout this period. In April, two VAW-121 aircraft were deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in support of operation "WHALE TAIL" enclosure (3). The detachment was on continuous alert for Soviet TU-95 Bear D maritime reconnaissance aircraft, and on 20 and 21 April an E-2C did locate and control the radar intercept of two Bear aircraft. For this action the Squadron received a Secretary of the Navy Letter of Commendation.

3. Throughout May, June, and July, VAW-121 participated in several exercises in the VACAPES operating area. In May the squadron provided close air support for Navy and Air Force fighter aircraft in operations "QUICK THRUST" and "FAST EAGLE". During June, VAW-121 worked with Navy fighter aircraft based at NAS Oceana in support of their FFARP exercises (Fleet Fighter ACM Readiness Program). Also during June, one squadron aircraft worked with EA-6B aircraft at NAS Whidbey Island, Washington, coordinating Electronic Support Measures (ESM) tactics. Again in July, a squadron aircraft deployed to Jacksonville, Florida, in support of a joint SSSC and Link exercise with S-3 aircraft in the JAX OPAREA. The squadron also stood periods of alert for exercise "SOPWITH CAMEL", providing airborne early warning intercepts of Soviet TU-95 aircraft activity in the VACAPES area. In late July, the squadron performed refresher CARQUALS aboard USS EISENHOWER in preparation for an impending deployment.

4. VAW-121 once again deployed in August onboard USS EISENHOWER as an integral unit of CVW-7. This deployment consisted of Refresher Training (REFTRA), Type Training 1, 2, 3 (TYT) and the Operational Readiness Evaluation (ORE) of EISENHOWER and CVW-7, enclosure (4). VAW-121's participation in these exercises is described below:

a) 1-20 August: REFTRA at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Day/night carrier refresher landings for all squadron pilots, Damage Control PQS, and intelligence/EW training for all aircrews were conducted.

b) 18 September - 19 October: TYT's 1, 2, 3 were performed at the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF) at Roosevelt Roads, P.R. Emphasis during the initial TYT was on unit training and provided the squadron's NFO's with their first opportunity to control and interact with the F-14 crews of VF-142 and VF-143. TYT 1 operations also focused on E2/CIC SSSC coordination and E2/EA-6B/CIC ESM exercises using the AFWTF EW range. TYT 2 emphasis was placed on CVW-7 tactical operations. Missions tasked to the squadron consisted of: VA/VAQ raid control against EISENHOWER VF/VAW JAMEX control, AFWTF MISSILEX range surveillance, Anti-ship Cruise Missile Exercises (ASCMEX), War at Sea Exercises (WASEX), coordinated strikes with simultaneous VF Adversary control, and Search and Rescue Exercises (SAREX). During this period inadequate aircrew manpower resulted in several instances of E-2 mission saturation. TYT 3 saw more emphasis placed on tactical operations according to the newly published CVW-7 TACNOTES. In addition, E-2's participated in EMCON and Hummer Controlled Approach (HCA) training.

c) 20 - 23 October: Commander Carrier Group EIGHT conducted a combined ORE of EISENHOWER and CVW-7. VAW-121 was awarded an adjective grade of "Low Outstanding" for the ORE, which placed the squadron in a first place tie for the top squadron ORE grade. During the ORE, the squadron had a 100% sortie completion rate, a 100% carrier boarding rate, and the highest graded carrier landing score in CVW-7. The squadron performed impressively both operationally and in intelligence and NATOPS examinations.

5. Following a brief two week inport period in Norfolk, VAW-121 embarked in IKE to participate in COMTUEX 1-79. Specific operations in this 14 November - 4 December exercise included:

a) 15 November: An AAWEX was conducted in the Charleston and Jacksonville Operating Areas enroute to the Gulf of Mexico. E-2's were employed as the AEW platform against unopposed raids by the USAF and USMC against the Task Group. It also provided the opportunity to fly RADM WALTERS, CRUDESGRU EIGHT, on an E-2 demonstration flight for familiarization with E-2C capabilities.

b) 16, 23, 27 November; 1-2 December: On these four occasions the Task Group transited the Straits of Florida, between Cuba and Florida, and twice through the Yucatan Channel conducting EMCON flight operations southwest of Cuba. Here the E-2C system capabilities, particularly those of the APS-125 radar (ARPS) and PDS, were truly optimized. E-2's controlled F-14 intercepts of Cuban military aircraft; one section of MIG-21 FISHBED's and three IL-14 CRATE surveillance aircraft.

c) 17 - 22 November: GULFEX 1-79 in the Gulf of Mexico saw the U.S. Task Group and United Kingdom (UK) Navy ships participate in an extensive AAW and Power Projection exercise with the U. S. Air Force, and War at Sea (WAS) exercises against U.S. units simulating threat platforms. Dual E-2 coverage was necessary to accomplish multi-mission tasking. Crew augmentation from CARAEWRON 120 and supply support provided by Grumman Aircraft Corporation contributed significantly to VAW-121 successfully meeting all mission tasking with a 100% sortie completion mark for GULFEX.

d) 28 - 29 November: Open ocean MISSILEX in the Gulf of Mexico saw E-2's and S-3's providing surveillance and coordination for the eight ships firing surface-to-air missiles.

e) 3 December: E-2's provided communications coordination between IKE and several small strike elements in a "stream" MINEX off Charleston, S.C. E-2 AUTOCAT was employed to allow IKE to monitor progress of the evolution directly.

6. On 21 November an E-2C ARPS indoctrination and demonstration flight was provided for Dr. Alton G. KEEL, Staff Technical Assistant to Senator Cannon (D. Nev), Chairman, Senate Armed Services TACAIR Subcommittee.

Upon return to Norfolk a squadron aircraft participated in an aerial photograph flight with representatives of Life Magazine in preparation for a February 1979 article on U.S. strategic strike systems. During the month of December, VAW-121 began final preparations for their 16 January 1979 departure on an extended Mediterranean deployment aboard the USS EISENHOWER.

7. 1978 was an extraordinarily successful year for VAW-121, enclosure (5). Squadron aircraft maintenance for the entire year was outstanding. During the January 1978 to March 1978 deployments, maintenance suffered from a lack of shipboard intermediate repair support and trained personnel. Through long hours of training and dedicated performance, the squadron produced a high operational readiness mark for these initial deployments and developed a track record that distinguished the squadron in the later ORE. Despite increased mission tasking the aircraft systems performed well, a tribute to the E-2C ARPS aircraft and VAW-121's maintenance organization.

1978 was also a year of continued safety in flight operations for VAW-121. On 15 December, VAW-121 completed twelve years of accident free flying. In recognition, the squadron received the Commander Naval Air Force Atlantic Accident Free Flight Award. The squadron has flown over 62,000 hours in achieving this safety plateau.

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY

1. Combat Readiness

a. Flight hours:

- (1) Total flight hours granted: 2,295.0
- (2) Total flight flown: 2,279.8
 - a) Day: 1,835.9
 - b) Night: 443.9
- (3) Total Embarked hours: 1,278.6
 - a) Day: 978.4
 - b) Night: 300.2

b. Ship landings

- (1) Total carrier arrested landings: 398
 - a) Day: 274
 - b) Night: 124
- (2) Overall boarding rate: 94.8%
 - a) Day: 95.8%
 - b) Night: 92.7%

2. Weapons Systems Readiness

a. Aircraft availability:

- (1) Aircraft availability:
 - a) Full systems capable (FSC) rate: 64.3%
 - b) Operation ready rate: 73.6%

b. Cannibalization rate per 100 flight hours: 19.4%

c. A799 rate: 2.2%

- d. Material condition: Pre-cruise corrosion inspection:
- (1) Semi-annual - satisfactory
 - (2) Pre-deployment - satisfactory

3. Aviation Safety

a. Total continuous hours accident free: 62,245.0

b. Major accidents: None

c. Minor accidents: None

d. Ground accidents: None

e. Unsatisfactory report incidents: 40

f. NATOPS changes: 19

4. Personnel Readiness

a. Retention rate:

(1) Officers: Two officer resignations, both seeking employment with commercial air carriers.

(2) Enlisted:

- a) First tour: 50% (1 of 2)
- b) Second tour: 50% (1 of 2)
- c) Career: 37.5% (3 of 8)

b. Advancement (enlisted)

- (1) Number eligible: 56
- (2) Number advanced: 29

C. NOTEWORTHY ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Squadron Awards and Accomplishments

- a. SECNAV Letter of Commendation for operations "WHALETAIL" and "SOPWITH CAMEL" (April - July)
- b. 100% Sortie Completion Rate: ORE (October)
- c. ORE Grade: Low Outstanding (October)
- d. CVW-7 Golden Tailhook Award (highest carrier landing score in CVW-7 (22 September - 23 October)
- e. USS EISENHOWER Silver Wrench Award (CVW-7 Outstanding Maintenance Department (October - December)
- f. 100% Sortie Completion Rate: GULFEX 1-79 (November)
- g. COMNAVAIRLANT Accident Free Flight Award (December)