VP ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

AN ASSOCIATION OF VETERANS WHO SERVED WITH THE NAVAL AIR RESERVE PATROL SQUADRONS BASED AT NAS SQUANTUM MA, NAS SOUTH WEYMOUTH MA, AND NAS BRUNSWICK ME.

NOTE, CURRENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF ANY U.S. NAVY PATROL SQUADRON ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US!

ISSUE 98 **HTTP://WWW.VPASSOCIATION.ORG** **DEC 2024**

Welcome to another edition of the VP Association newsletter. Please direct all VP Association-related inquiries or correspondence to Marc Frattasio, PO Box 30, Pembroke MA 02339, 781-294-4491, marc_frattasio@yahoo.com.

RECCO:

ABOVE: *A poor quality photo, but when was the last time you saw a color shot of PBYs at NAS Squantum? These aircraft, operated by VP-911, are shown here in the early 1950s. Got something similar to share? If so, contact Marc Frattasio at marc_frattasio@yahoo.com.*

FINAL FLIGHTS:

We lost Ken Tucker and Mark Holbrook. Both were CPOs in VP-92. Mark was also in the VP-MAU.

ILL SHIPMATES IN NEED OF CHEERING UP:

Arthur Ricca and Susan Zimmerman, who were both in VP-92, have had recent health issues. You can reach Arthur via e-mail at rnairplane@hotmail.com and Susan is at birdlady650@hotmail.com.

REGARDING THE COST OF PRINTING AND MAILING NEWSLETTERS…

If you have an e-mail address and get your newsletter in the mail please contact George Driscoll at gnddriscoll@gmail.com ASAP so we can send it to you via e-mail. Remember, we do not charge dues and operate on a shoestring thanks to volunteer labor, memorabilia sales, and donations. If you have an e-mail address and get a paper newsletter it would be better for us to send it via e-mail.

LOST CONTACT:
Be sure to inform George Driscoll at gnddriscoll@gmail.com about home or e-mail address changes.

SUSAN ZIMMERMAN:

Susan Zimmerman, who was an AK with VP-92 at NAS South Weymouth, was in the VA Hospital in West Roxbury, MA recently. One member of the VA Hospital staff who helped take care of her while she was there was Arthur Hapenney, who was also in VP-92 and recognized her immediately. This photo was taken by another member of the staff during a visit by your newsletter editor while Susan was in the hospital. She's doing better now. If you served with Susan and would like to reach out to her you can contact her via e-mail at birdlady650@hotmail.com.

THE ADVENTURES OF KEVIN CAHILL AND MARC COURTEMANCH:

Kevin Cahill and Marc Courtemanch, who were both in VP-92 at NAS South Weymouth, recently used their space available travel privileges to take a European vacation. The photo presented here shows them posing with an old radial aircraft engine at the Polish National Aviation Museum in Krakow.

A PHOTO FROM ERNIE GODZUR:

Three generations of the Godzur family in uniform at the USS Constitution in Charlestown, MA recently. That's Ernie Godzur at left, along with his grandson and son. Ernie started out with helicopters at NAS South Weymouth and eventually ended up in VP-92.

THE 2024 NAS BRUNSWICK REUNION:

The 2024 NAS Brunswick base reunion, which was held on Friday and Saturday September 13th and 14th, was a terrific success. It turned out to be a beautiful sunny day and over 600 people showed up.

As you should know, your newsletter editor organized a combined VP-92 and VP-MAU command mini-reunion in conjunction with the larger base reunion. About 65 former VP-92 personnel and nearly 20 former VP-MAU personnel showed up for the mini-reunion.

Everybody who came to the command mini-reunion was presented with a complementary VP-92 and/or VP-MAU command ball cap, a VP-92 and/or VP-MAU command insignia pen, and an NAS Brunswick base insignia pin.

Although the NAS Brunswick base insignia pins are gone, we still have a few command ball caps and pens left. If you would like a cap and pen, you can have a set (while the supply lasts) in return for a $30 donation to the Brunswick Naval Aviation Museum. Contact your newsletter editor at marc_frattasio@yahoo.com for details.

Among the many points of interest for VP Association members was the presence of RADM Robert Clark and CAPT Sean Coffey. Robert Clark, who I believe is still a SELRES, was the last XO of VP-92 before the squadron was disestablished in 2007. Sean, you should know, was in the VP-MAU as a TACCO and served as CO of VP-92. He is presently working at the Pentagon as the chief counsel for the Navy, in other words, he's the Navy's top lawyer. Both men spoke at the reunion.

Another huge draw this year was the presence of a VP-8 P-8A Poseidon, VXS-1 P-3C Orion, and VT-35 T-44 Pegasus out on the old NAS Brunswick airfield. The aircraft were on static display all afternoon on Saturday. You could go inside, but due to new DOD rules, only if you have an active, reserve, or retired military ID card. Another new rule was that no photos were allowed of the P-8!

The VXS-1 P-3C Orion was of course very popular with visitors. There are only three U. S. Navy commands operating P-3s, VXS-1, VX-30, and VQ-1. VQ-1 will be disestablished in 2025 and then there will only be two Navy P-3 operators left.

If you missed out on attending this year, the Brunswick Naval Aviation Museum intends to try again in 2026. No promises, but they will try very hard to get the Navy to send a P-3 again. By that time, VXS-1 and VX-30 should still be operating a handful of P-3s, but information about this has been confusing and contradictory. There have been rumors swirling for some time that both VXS-1 and VX-30 would either be disestablished or retire their last P-3s by the end of 2026. However, the VXS-1 personnel that your newsletter editor spoke to at the 2024 NAS Brunswick base reunion said that their squadron is supposed to continue to operate at least one P-3C until 2027 and they said that VX-30 will have them until 2030. If this proves to be true, then there is a chance that the Brunswick Naval Aviation Museum will be able to get a P-3 for the next reunion in 2026. One thing is for sure, if any Navy P-3s are still available at that time, the reunion committee will try to get one to come.

Some photos taken at the 2024 NAS Brunswick base reunion follow:

ABOVE: *RADM Robert Clark with your newsletter editor. The admiral is holding a framed print of a VP-92 P-3C Orion painted by former VP-92 AK1 Susan Zimmerman.* ***Below:*** *Al Firnrohr, Faith Frattasio, your newsletter editor, and Allan Gilman, all formerly with VP-92, in the BNAM gift shop.*

ABOVE: *Dave Gilliland, Royce Stegman, your newsletter editor, and Rick Hodgekins of VP-92.*
Below: *Faith Frattasio, Kathy Quinn-Trexler, and Mary Primiano, all formerly with the VP-MAU. At right is Jack Primiano, Mary's husband, who was in VP-92.*

ABOVE AND BELOW: *Faith Frattasio and your newsletter editor handing out free geedunk during the combined VP-92 and VP-MAU mini-reunion. That's Kevin Cahill from VP-92 and the BNAM in the background.*

ABOVE: *Partial group photo of VP-92 reunion attendees.* ***Below:*** *Partial group photo of VP-MAU reunion attendees. We tried to round everybody up for group photos but it proved impossible to do!*

ABOVE: *Eric Haas, Rick Caesar, Mike Mora, and your newsletter editor outside the main reunion tent. All were members of VP-MAU's CAC-1. Mike Mora was the VP-MAU's final commanding officer!* ***Below:*** *VXS-1's P-3C Orion with a long line of people waiting their turn to get on board. The VP-8 P-8A Poseidon is barely visible at left. They had signs posted all around this aircraft asking people not to take photos, so I have none to share here!*

ABOVE: *Mary and Jack Primiano, Mike Boucher (VP-MAU), your newsletter editor, Faith Frattasio, and Mike Mora enjoying the reunion banquet.* ***Below:*** *Sean Coffey, former VP-92 CO and the USN's general counsel, speaking to the crowd after the banquet.*

NEW VP-92 CAPS AND OTHER THINGS FROM LARRY DALY:

As some of you may know. Our old shipmate Larry Daly from VP-92 operates a custom embroidery shop called Eastern Embroidery in North Carolina. Recently, he expanded his line to include ball caps (and other things) that can be decorated with embossed leather patches. A few sample cap designs featuring a leather patch with naval aircrew wings are presented above. If you'd like something like this reach out to Larry via e-mail at easternemb@msn.com or call at 252-247-7967.

AIRBUS A321MPA SELECTED By FRENCH NAVY (Global Defense News 11/8):

In a strategic win for Airbus Defence and Space, the French Ministry of the Armed Forces has chosen Airbus's A321MPA (Maritime Patrol Aircraft) proposal for its Patmar program, replacing Dassault Aviation's competing bid. The French financial journal reported this decision "La Tribune" on November 7, 2024, marking a significant step in the French Navy's plans to modernize its maritime

patrol capabilities post-2030. Based on the A321XLR airframe, the A321MPA is set to replace France's aging fleet of Atlantique 2 aircraft, which have been operational since the 1990s, conducting missions such as anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).

The French Navy's Patmar (Patrouille Maritime) program is an initiative to modernize and replace its fleet of maritime patrol aircraft to meet current and future operational demands. This program is essential for enhancing France's maritime surveillance, anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare (ASuW), and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, especially in response to evolving maritime threats.

The Patmar program specifically seeks to replace the fleet of 18 Atlantique 2 (ATL2) aircraft, which have been operational since the late 1980s. Although the ATL2s have undergone several upgrades to extend their lifespan, their capabilities must be more matched by newer technologies and complex modern threats, especially in contested maritime areas. France aims to phase out the ATL2 by the early 2030s with a new platform that leverages advanced sensors, extended range, improved endurance, and multi-mission flexibility.

The Airbus A321MPA is a state-of-the-art, multi-role maritime patrol platform specifically designed for extended-range operations over vast naval zones. Utilizing the commercial A321XLR platform, the A321MPA provides substantial range, endurance, and payload capacity, making it well-suited for extended missions. Its airframe modifications include enhanced fuel storage, larger fuselage space, and specialized maritime systems, including advanced radar, sonar, and sonobuoy launchers for anti-submarine warfare.

The A321MPA's mission suite is designed to integrate multiple sensors, electro-optical and infrared systems, and electronic warfare capabilities, giving operators comprehensive surveillance and situational awareness capabilities. Additionally, it is engineered with modular systems that can be adapted for roles such as search-and-rescue (SAR) and surface target tracking, emphasizing operational versatility. By leveraging a commercial platform, Airbus offers significant lifecycle cost savings and logistical ease while retaining the capabilities required for military missions.

The Atlantique 2, or ATL2, entered service with the French Navy in the late 1980s and has been a mainstay of France's maritime patrol capabilities for over three decades. Developed by Dassault Aviation, the ATL2 has been extensively used for ASW, anti-surface warfare, and ISR operations. Its robust design and capability for carrying torpedoes, depth charges, and missiles made it ideal for Cold War-era maritime defense needs.

Despite undergoing significant upgrades to remain effective, the ATL2 fleet is reaching the end of its operational life, necessitating a replacement to address modern threats and advanced adversarial technologies. The selection of the Airbus A321MPA reflects France's commitment to enhancing its maritime capabilities with a next-generation platform tailored to contemporary and future operational requirements.

The Airbus A321MPA program, expected to go operational in the early 2030s, positions France at the forefront of European maritime security. As part of the Patmar initiative, the new aircraft will significantly upgrade France's maritime surveillance, reconnaissance, and defense capabilities, offering greater flexibility and technological sophistication to support NATO and EU security operations. This program represents a new chapter in French maritime aviation as France prepares to safeguard its maritime interests against increasingly complex security challenges.

AIRBUS UNVEILS A321MPA: ANSWER TO BOEING'S P-8A POSEIDON (Simple Flying 11/8):
Airbus has recently unveiled an Airbus A321XLR maritime patrol derivative, that is arguably an answer to Boeing's P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol offering, in the Airbus A321MPA, with the MPA standing for Maritime Patrol Aircraft. The French Navy has selected the A321MPA as their next maritime patrol aircraft. According to an Airbus spokesperson, the A321MPA is intended to meet the French Navy's need for an anti-submarine, anti-ship and intelligence gathering aircraft.

An Airbus spokesperson shared with Simple Flying the Airbus A321MPA concept:

"The integration of a comprehensive mission system and a large weapons bay, while offering optimum performance at long range to perform high-end anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare missions from detection to engagement. … Our platform also integrates a more comprehensive mission payload with latest-generation sensors such as the fixed-antenna radar and a very advanced underwater detection solution (acoustic sensor and sonobuoys)."

Indeed, the A321XLR will be an airframe with the ability to target ships via the radar and with sonobuoys submarines. Additionally, the A321XLR offers with its long range the ability to provide persistent surveillance, and fly faster than its predecessor the Dassault Atlantique 2, with a cruise speed of 200 mph (321 kph) but a dash speed of 400 mph (644 kph).

The A321MPA, like the P-8A Poseidon and the Dassault Atlantique 2, will come with large observation windows, a FLIR turret, conformal radars, various antennas for communications and electronic surveillance, and a large weapons bay. The concept is for eight torpedoes in the bay and a highly networked aircraft that can do both maritime patrol and "overland surveillance". However, it appears there will be no wing pylons to externally mount anti-ship and surface strike weapons, unlike the P-8A Poseidon mounting AGM-84 Harpoons.

An A321MPA model was at Euronaval 2024. As one can see, this integration is with a commercial airframe in the Airbus A321XLR and a 40-year lifespan including easy upgradability and a focus on affordability. Thales is also a partner with Airbus on the A321MPA project as to avionics. Finally, the team hopes to make a marketable export version.

The main reason the A321MPA is based on the A321XLR is because the A321XLR can fly a range of 4,700 NM (8,650 km) commercially. It's significantly longer than the A321NEO's range of just over 3,200 NM (6,000 km). Additionally, the P-8A can only be ferried 4,500 NM. One should also note that while the P-8A is based on 737 Next Generation technologies of the 1990s as a modified Boeing 737-800ERX, the A321XLR and A321MPA will use all the benefits of the A320NEO family efficiency upgrades.

The A321XLR also comes with an extra special fuel tank. Recently, the A321XLR completed its first passenger flight with Iberia flying from Madrid to Paris as a short haul test. Already Wizz Air is planning a 7-hour, 20-minute Milan Malpensa-Abu Dhabi route for 2025 if Wizz Air gets enough A321XLRs in time. This clearly shows the endurance capabilities of the A321XLR narrowbody.

But although other Airbus products come with longer ranges, like the Airbus A330-800NEO with an 8,150 NM range, the A321XLR was arguably picked as the right-size platform as, after so much flying, the maritime patrol crew needs to be well-rested. Additionally, a widebody would cost more for limited capability improvement. With that, here are some basic A321XLR facts from Airbus:

• 101-ton take-off weight
• 16,000 liters/4226.8 gallon fuel capacity

• 4,700 nm (8,650 km) range

With the A321XLR the ultimate extension of A320NEO family capability, the A321MPA will have good capability to provide persistent surveillance and strike capability to any operator. Although the A321XLR has more range than the P-8A and a MAD boom that the P-8A lacks, the A321XLR's current lack of underwing pylons gives the P-8A a clear advantage in weapon-carrying capability. Meanwhile, P-8A Poseidon production is winding down as orders for Germany, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the US Navy Reserve are fulfilled.

Simple Flying article by Joe Kunzler

THE LAST VQ-1 EP-3E ARIES HAS COMPLETED ITS FINAL MISSION (The Aviationist 10/29):
On October 29, 2024, after nearly sixty years of service, the EP-3E Aries II ISR (Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance) aircraft, made its final flight in the U.S. 5th Fleet's AOR (Area Of Responsibility) as a detachment from the "World Watchers" of Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron (VQ) 1. The U.S. 5th Fleet's operational area spans approximately 2.5 million square miles of water, covering the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean, and key choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal, and the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb.

Crews of VQ-1 were initially scheduled to return to their home base at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island, Washington in time to celebrate cease of operations by September 30, 2024, but the ceremony had to be postponed for operational needs, first to October 8, 2024 (with a deactivation scheduled for March 31, 2025), and then to an undefined date.

Lt. Cmdr. Justin "Gump" Roberts, officer-in-charge of the VQ-1 detachment, said in a public statement: "It's incredible to consider all those who have contributed to the EP-3 heritage over the past 55 years. The success of this platform is due entirely to our dedicated maintenance team and the exceptional ISR work of our aircrew. Being part of this legacy is an honor."

Lt. Bradford "Chad" Holcombe, the aircraft commander, expressed pride in VQ-1's history and his gratitude for being part of it. "From my first day with VQ-1, it was clear how much pride every member has in the platform, mission, and the effort required to execute it anytime, anywhere. Flying the final mission is a privilege," he said.

Capt. Dennis "Rudy" Jensen, Commodore of Task Force 57, has been around the P-3 since 1979: "My father was a P-3 pilot during the Cold War, and I've flown the variants of the same aircraft since 2002. Few other airplanes are as 'time-tested & mother approved' as the P-3," Jensen said. "Its longevity and ability to operate from remote locations in austere environments for over half a century is a testament to those who designed, built, maintained and operated it. Much like the ever-changing platforms onboard the flight deck of an aircraft carrier, the mission systems inside the EP-3E have evolved over time. The ability to evolve has enabled the EP-3E to remain viable and effective through today."

After a 30-day extension of its scheduled tour of duty and the successful completion of the type's last deployment, the VQ-1's EP-3E BuNo 159893 returned to NASWI on November 6, 2024. It was preceded by 161410, which returned from Souda Bay on November 1, 2024. Aircraft "893" will be retired and delivered to the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG) at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, where it will be stored in the so-called "Boneyard." VQ-1 has already retired some of its oldest airframes, including the aircraft BuNo 156511, the EP-3E involved in a collision with a Chinese Navy J-8 fighter jet off China on April 1, 2001, in what became known as the "Hainan Incident."

The EP-3E Aries II is a signals intelligence platform that has served for decades, gathering intelligence on foreign communications, electronic emissions, and troop movements. The crew of 24 includes pilots, tactical evaluators, and cryptologic technicians. The type first came into prominence in the late 1960s and has been continuously upgraded over the years to keep up with advancing technology. The aircraft, the U.S. Navy's only land-based reconnaissance asset, was upgraded from being purely a signals intelligence (SIGINT) aircraft to a Multi-Intelligence platform equipped with a bunch of receivers and high-gain antennas which allow it to intercept a broad spectrum of electronic emissions deep within hostile territories. The crew processes and merges the collected intelligence and distributes the information for use in various military applications such as threat detection, air defense suppression, battlefield awareness, and anti-submarine warfare.

The EP-3E has operated near all the world's main hotspots, including Libya, Syria and the Caribbean Sea, where the spy plane has often been intercepted by Russian and Chinese fighter jets in tense aerial encounters. The type gained particular notoriety after the already mentioned international incident on April 1, 2001, when it was forced to make an emergency landing on Hainan Island, China, following a collision with a Chinese fighter jet. The crew and aircraft were detained for 11 days.

The EP-3E Aries II will be replaced by the Northrop Grumman MQ-4C Triton. The Triton is a high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial system that supports a "wide range" of missions, including maritime patrol, signals intelligence and search and rescue. The MQ-4C Triton, which operates at a higher altitude and has a longer endurance than the EP-3E, also incorporates simultaneous multi-intelligence sensor operations and can exchange data with U.S. and allied sea, air, land and space-based assets for optimal strategic situational awareness. The VUP (special projects patrol squadron) will take over these responsibilities with the new Triton which has already been deployed to key bases all around the world, including Guam, NAS Sigonella, and to the Middle East.

The Aviationist article by David Cenciotti

HAINAN INCIDENT EP-3E JOINS PIMA AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM (The Aviationist 10/24):

Although the U.S. Navy has postponed the retirement of its last EP-3E Aries II aircraft, Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron (VQ) 1 "World Watchers"—the primary operator of this signals intelligence platform since its inception (with VQ-2 "Sandeman," which was disbanded in 2012, being the other)—has already retired some of its oldest airframes. Among them is BuNo 156511, the EP-3E involved in a collision with a Chinese Navy J-8 fighter jet on April 1, 2001, in what became known as the "Hainan Incident."

That very EP-3E will soon be on public display at the Pima Air and Space Museum, where it arrived on October 22, 2024. The aircraft was in fact towed from the nearby "Boneyard" at the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG) and will undergo restoration before joining the museum's collection.

On April 1, 2001, the EP-3E 156511 of VQ-1 launched from Kadena Air Base, in Okinawa, Japan, on a routine electronic intelligence (ELINT) mission. Using radio callsign PR32, the aircraft flew over the South China Sea collecting signals intelligence from international airspace.

As the EP-3E was 5 hours into its mission, flying at an altitude of 22,000 feet and at 180 knots, it was intercepted by two PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) Shenyang J-8II fighter jets scrambled from Lingshui airfield on Hainan Island, China. One of the J-8s, piloted by Lt. Cmdr. Wang Wei, made several close passes at the EP-3; on the third pass, the two aircraft collided.

The force of the collision was catastrophic for the J-8, which broke into two pieces, while the EP-3 sustained severe damage. Wang Wei, the pilot of the Chinese J-8, was seen ejecting from his aircraft. His body was never recovered, and he was presumed dead, later hailed as a hero in China.

Its radome was torn off completely, and its left propeller was badly damaged. The Chinese fighter's tail fin struck the EP-3's left aileron, sending the U.S. plane into an uncontrollable dive. The aircraft plummeted 14,000 feet before the pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn (who later wrote a compelling book – Born to Fly: The Untold Story of the Downed American Spy – that this Author read several years ago and highly recommend), managed to stabilize it. With the EP-3 severely compromised, Osborn made the critical decision to attempt an emergency landing at the nearest airfield: Lingshui.

In the 26 minutes following the collision, the EP-3 crew worked frantically to destroy classified materials aboard the aircraft, following the standard protocol to prevent sensitive information from falling into "enemy" hands. Improvisation played a key role in these efforts; in the absence of formal training for such a scenario, the crew used coffee and axes to destroy hard drives and other equipment. However, despite their efforts, not all of the classified data was successfully destroyed.

Osborn successfully brought the heavily damaged EP-3 down at Lingshui airfield, where it landed without flaps or trim and with only partial control of its systems. The plane landed at 170 knots with significant damage, including a disabled engine and a malfunctioning propeller.

Upon landing, the 24 crew members of the EP-3 were detained by Chinese authorities and held for 10 days. During this period, the crew was interrogated repeatedly, though they were generally treated well. Despite the conditions, which included sleep deprivation and unfamiliar food, the crew maintained high spirits.

Negotiations for the crew's release were tense, and a diplomatic resolution was eventually reached with the delivery of a formal communication known as the "Letter of the Two Sorries." In this letter, U.S. Ambassador Joseph Prueher expressed "regret and sorrow" for the incident but stopped short of offering an official apology, a stance that was consistent with U.S. policy. This nuanced wording was acceptable to the Chinese government, which subsequently released the crew on April 11, 2001. The disassembled EP-3 was returned to the U.S. using an AN-124 on Jul. 3, 2001. The U.S. Pacific Command had begun operations to return the damaged surveillance plane June 13.

The incident strained U.S.-China relations and led to increased tensions in the region. Lt. Shane Osborn was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions during the crisis, while J-8 pilot Wang Wei was posthumously honored as a national hero in China. The event, which occurred just 10 weeks after George W. Bush took office, marked his first major foreign policy challenge. The standoff raised concerns over U.S. surveillance operations in proximity to China, though these missions continued largely unchanged.

In the years following the incident, Chinese forces briefly reduced their aggressive intercepts of U.S. surveillance aircraft, but tensions persisted, particularly around Hainan Island, a strategic base for China's submarine fleet. Incidents involving U.S. and NATO assets and Chinese jets continue to occur every now and then in the region.

The Aviationist article by David Cenciotti

US NAVY EP-3E ARIES II SPY PLANE RETIREMENT POSTPONED (Aviation Geek Club 10/16):

Because of the US Navy's current operational commitments, the service recently postponed a planned homecoming ceremony for two EP-3E ARIES (Airborne Reconnaissance Integrated

Electronic System) II electronic reconnaissance aircraft and their crews. As Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron One (VQ-1) recently said on its Facebook page; “Huge thanks from VQ-1 to everyone who attended the home coming ceremony. It was disappointing to not have our final crews return home on the day, but all the family, friends and alumni who still attended the event made it feel like a VQ family reunion.”

The two crews were supposed to have returned to Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island, Washington, the unit’s home base. A subsequent ceremony would have welcomed them home from the final operational deployments of VQ-1 and the EP-3E. As reported by Seapower Magazine, VQ-1 was supposed to cease operations on September 30, 2024 and was scheduled for deactivation on March 21, 2025. Operational commitments (likely related to the hostilities in the Middle East) not only delayed the cessation but have also required continued operations to an undetermined date.

According to an October 8th statement to Seapower Magazine from the Navy’s maritime patrol reconnaissance program office, the last EP-3Es may not be retired until March 2025 (although because of OPSEC [operations security] the number of aircraft cannot be disclosed). After retirement the EP-3Es will be delivered to the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (309th AMARG) at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona.

VQ-1 “World Watchers”, based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington, provides aerial reconnaissance flying EP-3E ARIES II aircraft. The squadron received the first EP-3 ARIES I in 1969. The first EP-3s started to work alongside the unit’s A-3 Skywarriors and Super Constellations. For a time in fact VQ-1 consisted of thirty aircraft: sixteen Skywarriors, twelve Super Constellations and two Orions.

After the departure of the last Skywarrior in the late 1980’s, the squadron flew the EP-3 ARIES I exclusively. In 1991 the squadron closed its permanent detachment in NAS Atsugi, Japan after 30 years and moved it to NAF Misawa, Japan. In the same year, VQ-1 received the first EP-3E ARIES II, an upgraded version of the Aries I using modified P-3C airframes. The squadron played a key role in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Despite the harsh, difficult maintenance environment and 30-year-old aircraft, VQ-1 amassed nearly 1400 combat flight hours with a 100% mission completion rate. Tasking included strike support, combat search and rescue, communications and over-the-horizon-targeting support to coalition forces.

In 1994, as a result of the base closure of NAS Agana, Guam, VQ-1 was notified of the homeport change to NAS Whidbey Island, Washington. Coincidentally, in July 1994, VQ-1 retired the Navy’s oldest operational P-3, EP-3E ARIES I BUNO 148887. Its retirement also marked VQ-1’s transition to all EP-3E ARIES II mission aircraft.

The Lockheed Martin EP-3E ARIES II is a land-based Multi-Intelligence reconnaissance aircraft based on the P-3 Orion airframe. The EP-3E ARIES II was recently upgraded from SIGINT to Multi-Intelligence and is the Navy’s only land-based reconnaissance aircraft. The EP-3 aircraft in the Navy’s inventory provide fleet and theater commanders worldwide with near real-time tactical SIGINT and full motion video intelligence.

With sensitive receivers and high-gain dish antennas, the EP-3E exploits a wide range of electronic emissions from deep within targeted territory. The crew fuses the collected intelligence along with off-board data and disseminates the collaborated information for direct threat warning, indications and warnings, information dominance, battle space situational awareness, suppression of enemy air defenses, destruction of enemy air-defense, anti-air warfare and anti-submarine warfare applications.

The Northrop Grumman MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles are replacing the EP-3Es. Along with the EP-3Es, the US Navy flies a handful of P-3C, NP-3C, and NP-3D Orion aircraft operated by Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 30 (VX-30) at NAS Point Mugu, California, and by Scientific Development Squadron One (VXS-1) at NAS Patuxent River, Maryland.

Aviation Geek Club article by Dario Leone

JAPAN PUSHING EW AIRCRAFT BASED ON KAWASAKI P-1 MPA (The Aviationist 9/22):

Japan is advancing its own domestic Electronic Warfare (EW) plane, based on its indigenously-developed Kawasaki P-1 Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA). Its Ministry of Defence (MoD) has sought $292 million for Fiscal Year 2025 to acquire an EW plane for the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF). The country has seen persisting military threats from Russia, North Korea and China.

Reports quoting the Japan MoD budget document said that Tokyo aims to strengthen “capabilities to gather information on electromagnetic waves” which is “necessary for electronic jamming and electronic protection.” The war in Ukraine has shown the significant impacts of Russian EW, which has had a devastating impact on Ukrainian battlefield communications and drone operations.

The PLA Air Force’s Y-9LG electronic attack and EW plane that made an appearance during Chinese military drills with Thailand in August, has been assessed to be a long-range jamming platform by The War Zone. The U.S. Air Force’s Air Combat Command welcomed its first EA-7B Compass Call at the Davis-Monthan AFB on Aug. 23, 2024.

The Japan MoD document, noting that there are “multi-purpose aircraft (EP-3, etc.),” adds “none that meet the functions and performance requirements of the JMSDF.” Additionally, “it will become difficult to maintain these multi-purpose aircraft in the mid-2020s.” “Similar equipment and electronic warfare aircraft from overseas are difficult to acquire due to their defense sensitivity.”
The EP-3 is the Communications, Signals and Electronic Intelligence (COMINT, SIGINT and ELINT) version of the P-3C Orion Maritime Patrol Aircraft. Japan operates both the EP-3 and the P-3. The

P-1 plane meanwhile first flew in September 2007 and the JMSDF received the first two units on Mar. 27, 2013. Japan aims to replace about 80 of its aging P-3C Orion MPAs with about 70 P-1 aircraft, according to The Japan Times.

Given that the P-1 MPA is meant to replace the P-3C Orion, it can stand to reason that the new P-1 based EW plane is also being evolved as a substitute for the EP-3. This is especially at a time of increasing North Korean cruise and ballistic missile launches, which require persistent monitoring on Pyongyang's radar, communications emissions and the missiles' telemetry data being beamed back to the ground control centers. It must be clarified that this particular document in question does not specifically mention either China, Russia or North Korea. Thus the Japan MoD "aims to reduce development costs by utilizing the results of previous research into next generation electronic intelligence gathering aircraft."

An "electronic warfare aircraft will be developed based on the P-1 by the required time, incorporating the electronic intelligence gathering capabilities of utility aircraft that are expected to be decommissioned around the 2020s, and contributing to strengthening the electromagnetic domain capabilities necessary for cross-domain operations." The image of the planned EW-capable P-1 shared by the Japan MoD on X, showed the aircraft with hemispherical bump-shaped radomes under the chin, on the top fuselage, spine and multiple blade-shaped antennae on the underbelly and the top and bottom tail line.

The P-1 has the distinction of being purpose-designed as a MPA (Maritime Patrol Aircraft), and not converted for the role like Boeing P-8 Poseidon used by the U.S., Indian Navy or Royal Australian Navy. The P-8 is derived from the Boeing 737-800 airliner. The P-1 also flies with an indigenous IHI Corporation F7-10 turbofan in a four-engine configuration installed on low-set wings, with the powerplant too specifically developed for the P-1.

The Full Authority Digital Engine Control (FADEC)-enabled F7s have a high bypass ratio of 8:1, according to Japanese reports, and enable a cruising speed of 830 km/h and a maximum speed of 996 km/h. This makes it 1.3 times faster than the P-3C Orion, can operate at higher altitudes and has surveillance endurance of 10 hours.

According to a Sep. 2015 report in the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), the P-1 was also, at least at the time, the only aircraft in the world to use 'fly-by-optics' Flight Control System (FCS). This uses fiber-optic cables, which minimizes electromagnetic interference in comparison to traditional metal wirings. Some of its major electronics and avionics are also domestically-developed. This includes a Toshiba HPS-106 AESA (Active Electronically Scanned Radar), a Fujitsu HAQ-2 FLIR (Forward-Looking Infrared), a Mitsubishi Electric HLR-109B ESM (Electronic Support System) and a Kawasaki HAS-108 data link suite.

During its development phase in April 2004 as the "P-X" program when Japan and the U.S. were discussing synergizing it with the U.S. Navy's Multi-Mission Aircraft (MMA), the Japanese MoD decided to persist with their own effort. "There was a possibility that foreign aircraft would not satisfy the required capability and there was a possibility that foreign aircraft would not meet the required period of introduction…it is necessary to domestically develop the aircraft," FlightGlobal quoted the Japan MoD.

Japan has long been trying to find international customers for the P-1. In a Feb. 2024 report, Italian Air Force officer Brigadier General Francesco Agresti identified the Kawasaki P-1 among the Boeing P-8A Poseidon and Leonardo's C27J being considered for a new MPA and ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) platform. In January 2017, New Zealand was reported to be the first to be offered the P-1,

along with Japan's other indigenously-developed medium-tactical transport aircraft, the C-2 to allow commonality between their surveillance and transport aircraft that would ease maintenance and logistics. However, in 2018, New Zealand selected the P-8A Poseidon. Reuters and The Diplomat also reported in April 2018 and June 2016 that Japan was looking at France and Thailand as potential buyers.

The Aviationist article by Parth Satam

ARGENTINA ENRICHES NAVAL SURVEILLANCE WITH P-3C ORION (Naval Technology 9/23):

In a step towards modernizing its defense forces, the Argentine Navy has officially received its first Lockheed Martin P-3C Orion aircraft from Norway. The acquisition is part of a strategy to enhance maritime surveillance in the nation's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Minister of Defense Luis Petri officiated the ceremony, emphasizing the aircraft's role in revitalizing the Navy's aviation capabilities. "This aircraft represents a great technological leap that puts our capabilities on par with those of the rest of the region and also represents a great opportunity for the transfer of capabilities," he stated.

The delivery of the P-3C Orion is part of the National Public Investment Project aimed at improving the capabilities of the Naval Aviation Command. The project includes three P-3C aircraft and one P-3N mobile logistics support aircraft, all of which will undergo an ASLEP (Aircraft Service Life Extension Program). This ensures a lifespan of approximately 17,000 flight hours, projected to last at least 15 years.

With a wingspan of 30.38 metres and a range of 1,500 nautical miles, the P-3 Orion is designed for various missions, including anti-submarine warfare, search and rescue (SAR), and humanitarian aid. Its capabilities—featuring infrared cameras, sensors, and real-time data processing—enhance the Navy's ability to monitor vast maritime areas.

The United States and Norway have both assisted in facilitating the acquisition. This partnership enhances the Argentine Navy's operational readiness and lays the groundwork for future technological transfers and collaboration.

Naval Technology article by Harry McNeill

ARGENTINA RECEIVES ITS FIRST MODERNIZED P-3C ORION (Overt Defense 9/10):
The Argentine Navy announced that the first of four ex-Lockheed P-3 Orion anti-submarine and maritime patrol aircraft purchased last year from the Royal Norwegian Air Force (Luftforsvaret) has arrived at the runway of Almirante Zar Naval Air Base in Trelew, Chubut Province. The first P-3C Orion, which served for many years in RNoAF service with serial number 3299 and the name 'Ulabrand,' will soon receive the tactical number 6-P-57 according to the Argentine navy and will be assigned to Naval Aviation Command No. 3 (Fuerza Aeronaval N.° 3, FAE3).

Following all these processes, the commissioning of the first aircraft will take place in mid-September at the Aeroparque Military Air Base in the city of Buenos Aires, in the presence of the Minister of Defence, Luis Alfonso Petri, and the Chief of Staff of the Navy, Vice Admiral Carlos María Allievi. Other Argentine officials and special guests are expected to attend the reception, as well as the Ambassadors of Norway and the United States of America to the Argentine Republic, Norwegian ministry officials, and the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

The Argentine Naval Aviation Command expects to take delivery of the contract's other three ex-Norwegian Lockheed P-3 Orion aircraft, which are currently undergoing maintenance and modernization in the US, by the end of 2025. Two aircraft, which can be used for another 15 years after modernization, will be the P-3C variant equipped to perform maritime patrol and anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare (ASuW) missions. The other will be a P-3N variant configured for search and rescue (SAR) operations.

Argentina, which has been using P-3Bs purchased from the US Navy since 1997 and are in need of repair, will significantly increase its long-range reconnaissance capability in the sea and river areas in its Exclusive Economic Zone with the addition of these relatively new four-engine turboprop patrol aircraft to its fleet.

Overt Defense article by Yusuf Cetiner

NAVY AWARDS $1.2B IN P-8A AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS (GovConWire 9/20):
The U.S. Navy has awarded indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contracts with a combined ceiling of $1.21 billion to AAR Government Services (NYSE: AIR) and StandardAero for the maintenance and repair of the P-8A Poseidon aircraft. Under each firm-fixed-price, time-and-materials IDIQ, the contractors will perform depot-level engine maintenance, repair, overhaul and field assessment and repair in support of the aircraft used by the Navy, Royal Australian Air Force, and foreign military sales customers, the Department of Defense said Thursday.

AAR Government Services will work in Atlanta, Georgia, and Wood Dale, Illinois, while Standard Aero will work in Winnipeg, Canada, and San Antonio, Texas. The IDIQ is expected to be completed in September 2029. Naval Air System Command serves as the contracting activity. Earlier, the Navy announced contracts with AAR and L3Harris Technologies (NYSE: LHX) for theP-8A Poseidon maintenance and other support services.

GovConWire article by Christine Thropp

PLANE MAKES FIRST PASS OVER TAIWAN STRAIT IN 5 MONTHS (Stars & Stripes 9/17):
A U.S. Navy surveillance aircraft flew over the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday for the first time in five months and just days after German naval vessels made their own trip through the contentious waterway. The P-8A Poseidon, a long-range aircraft equipped with an advanced sensor suite, flew through international airspace over the 110-mile-wide channel that separates mainland China from Taiwan, the U.S. 7th Fleet said in a news release Tuesday. "The aircraft's transit of the Taiwan Strait

demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," the Navy said in the release. "The United States military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows."

The flight began around 12:15 p.m. and concluded around 1 p.m., 7th Fleet spokeswoman Cmdr. Alison Maruca told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday. She did not elaborate on the direction the aircraft traveled. The transit was routine and not a response to any particular event, Maruca added. The U.S. routinely sends warships and, less frequently, aircraft, through the strait. The Navy typically describes the transits as a routine means of traveling between the South China Sea and East China Sea.

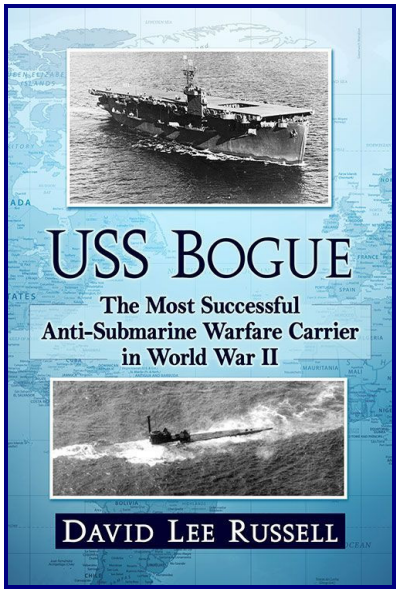
China has "sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction" over the waterway, former Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said in June 2022. He is now China's ambassador to Cambodia. Referring to the waterway as "international waters" is an attempt to manipulate China's claim over Taiwan, he said at the time. The communist government in Beijing views the transits as provocative and regularly condemns them as support for Taiwan. China considers the island a breakaway province that must be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

China's Eastern Theater Command had not publicly commented on the transit as of Tuesday afternoon. A 7th Fleet Poseidon aircraft last flew over the strait on April 17, prompting Beijing to scramble jets to track the flight. The Poseidon on Tuesday encountered foreign military forces, but the flight was not affected, Maruca said. She did not specify what nation or forces were involved. "All interactions with foreign military forces during the transit were consistent with international norms and did not impact the operation," she said.

Tuesday's transit came four days after the German frigate Baden-Wuerttemberg and support ship Frankfurt am Main made their own transit from the East China Sea and into the South China Sea. It was the first such transit by German ships in more than two decades, The Associated Press reported that day.

Stars & Stripes article by Alex Wilson

RECOMMENDED READING:



This book is about the combat history of the USS Bogue, an escort carrier that was involved (along with its escorts) with sinking eleven German and Japanese submarines and damaged two others during the Second World War. The author, David Lee Russell, is a former US Navy intelligence officer. The 6 x 9 inch paperback has 256 pages and 24 photographs. Its ISBN is 978-1-4766-9203-6. You can purchase it through Amazon or any other decent bookseller.

ON THE INTERNET:

A reminder that there are active groups on Facebook regarding NAS South Weymouth, NAS Brunswick, VP-92, and VP-MAU. Check them out!

PARTING SHOT:

ABOVE: *Reserve Lockheed SP-2E Neptune crew at NAS South Weymouth during the early-to-mid 1960s. Have something similar to share? Contact Marc Frattasio at marc_frattasio@yahoo.com.*

Until Next Time, Lose Not Thy Speed In Flight Lest The Earth Rise Up And Smite Thee – "Frat".