

FLEET COMPOSITE SQUADRON EIGHT
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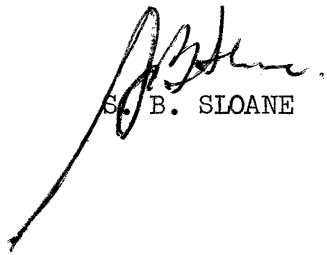
From: Commanding Officer, Fleet Composite Squadron EIGHT
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-05D2)

Subj: Command History

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B

Encl: (1) Command History 1974

1. In compliance with reference (a), enclosure (1) is hereby submitted.



S. B. SLOANE

FLEET COMPOSITE SQUADRON EIGHT

COMMAND HISTORY 1974

COMMAND ORGANIZATION

Commander Robert G. CARLSON, Commanding Officer during the first half of 1974, reported to VC-8 as Executive Officer on 15 May 1972. Commander CARLSON assumed command of the squadron on 11 July 1973, and was relieved by Commander Stephen B. SLOANE on 14 June 1974. In attendance during the change of command ceremonies was Rear Admiral James D. RAMAGE, Commander Fleet Air Caribbean. Commander CARLSON received orders to be the Air Officer aboard the USS NIMITZ. Commander Paul H. MOLENDA assumed duties as Executive Officer in June of 1974.

Operationally, VC-8 had a most successful year in 1974. A total of 4376 operational hours were flown, which included logistic flights, range patrols, airborne data links, trackexs, drone launches, spots and recoveries, medical evacuations, and SAR flights. VC-8 also flew 751 hours of pilot and aircrew training flights for a total of 5127 flight hours for the year. There were no changes in our assigned missions, but there was a significant change in the squadron's organization with the formation of a General Safety Department. In an effort to emphasize and organize the objectives of safety more effectively, a General Safety Department was established on 1 November 1974 with two separate divisions operating under the direction of a Department Head. The two divisions are the NATOPS Division, which includes the NATOPS Coordinator, Aircrew Training Coordinator and Type Leaders, and the Aviation Safety Division including the Aviation Safety and Ground Safety Officers.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS

JANUARY

January marked the start of Operation Springboard. Even though Springboard was relatively low key in 1974, the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range (AFWR) still relied heavily upon VC-8 to provide its normal spectrum of services to the USS BLAKELY, USS HAMILTON, USS GARCIA, USS BOWEN, USS NIPIGON, USS ANNAPOLIS, and the USS SANTA BARBARA. VC-8 added to its readiness and training by flying a total of 226 flight hours for the month.

FEBRUARY

February saw the completion of Operation Springboard 1974. Our A-4C SKYHAWKS flew manned raids for VMFA-45, USS BELKNAP, USS DUPONT, BNS PIAUI, USS CORONADO and the USS SPIEGEL GROVE. As the operational commitments began slowing down, training flights began to take on a large role in the daily routine.

Enclosure (1)

On the night of 14 February, one of our pilots LT Thomas B. WEST, was fatally injured when his A-4C SKYHAWK aircraft struck the water while flying a trackex for the USS CORONADO. There were two memorial services held in his honor, which included a Marine Corps rifle squad and bugler, as well as a "Missing Man" formation and flyover.

MARCH

LANTREADEX 3-74 was the first Atlantic Fleet readiness exercise of the year and took place from 1 March to 15 March. We flew a total of 220 flight hours for the month, over half of which was accomplished during the exercise. We provided services for the USS MT WHITNEY, USS TALBOT, HMS HUBIAN, and the USS J. L. BROWN.

APRIL

Two F-8's from VC-10 at NAS Guantanamo Bay assisted us in flying some of our missions due to all our A-4C's being grounded for engine hot air leaks. Two TA-4Fs were also here from Norfolk, Virginia for our jet pilots annual instrument re-qualifications.

Target services were provided this month for the HMS JUPITER, HMS BRIGHTON, USS PALANG, and the USS TALBOT.

MAY

While piloting an A-4C SKYHAWK on a post maintenance check flight, LT Ronald S. HILL noticed that his engine was failing to respond and that it was indicating an exceedingly high exhaust temperature. LT HILL turned the aircraft away from the housing area and safely ejected, averting a potential disaster as a result of the ensuing crash. LT HILL was quickly picked up out of the water by a Coast Guard helicopter.

This month was very heavy in the way of exercises due to the number of ships that we were working with AFWR. Among these were the USS AINSWORTH, USS DUPONT, USS MANITOWOC, and the ARV NUEVA ESPARTA.

JUNE

We were tasked to provide the services of our SH-3G helicopters to a Seal Team for their parachute re-qualifications. Other than that, this month was fairly relaxed due to all our heavy commitments during last month's exercises. We did, however, provide services to the HMCS ATHA-BASKAN, USS AYLIN, USS FORREST SHERMAN, and the USS DANIELS.

JULY

July was a fairly average month. We flew a total of 315 flight hours and provided range services to the USS CALIFORNIA, HMS MOHAWK, USS DANIELS, and the USS NUBIAN. Our A-4C SKYHAWKS flew 22 trackexs for various ships, including the USS PRATT, FNS KERSAINT, and the USS ALBANY.

AUGUST

Commitments the first part of the month were small in number, but by the third week our operations began to increase extensively with drone drops/spots, ADL's (Airborne Data Link), and recoveries for the various ships that were on the range, including HMS ESKIMO, USS GLENNON, USS WAIN-WRIGHT, and the USS CONNOLE.

SEPTEMBER

The squadron had a visit from the personnel at the Naval Underwater Systems Center who were here to conduct at-sea evaluations under the CNO project T/S 117. We were able to successfully evaluate the system using our helicopters in conjunction with the USS GRAYLING.

Ships we serviced this month included the USS SHREVEPORT, USS FAIRFAX, COUNTY, USS AUSTIN, USS HERMITAGE, and the USS GLOVER.

OCTOBER

There was a first for VC-8 this month when we moved, via helicopter, a six piece Threat Platform Simulator (TPS) into position at Culebra. The planning and coordination for this project was quite detailed since two of the TPS pieces weighed in excess of 4000 pounds, the largest external load ever lifted by our helicopters.

This month services were provided to the CG SECOND MARDIV, FGS MOELDERS, USS TRUETT, HMS TARTAR, and the USS NEW.

Also during this month, the J-65 engine test cell at the Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Department became operable. This culminated a six-month effort on the part of VC-8 to get the built-up J-65s test run locally prior to installation in our A-4C aircraft.

NOVEMBER

This month we serviced a number of ships on the range, including the USS EDWARD MCDONNELL, USS AUSTIN, and the USS CAPODANNO. We also serviced the 140th Air Combat Wing and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 333.

Also during November, VC-8 was tasked with the disaster control mission of transporting 5000 pounds of food and clothing provided by the Salvation Army to the flood stricken islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix.

DECEMBER

To finish up the remaining month of the year, VC-8 flew operational flights for the USS HERMITAGE, ITS ARDITO, USS TALBOT, USS SHREVEPORT, USS VALDEZ, USS BELKNAP, HMS ESKIMO, USS AUSTIN, and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 451. We also flew 121.5 hours of pilot and aircrew training flights.

SPECIAL TOPICS

VC-8 played a most important part in upgrading the capabilities of the naval units utilizing the facilities at Roosevelt Roads in 1974. The activity of VC-8 in 1974 can be measured by the number of drones launched and recovered, and the number of targets deployed. During 1974, 37 BQM-34As were air launched and 113 were recovered. VC-8 A-4C SKYHAWKS launched 26 AQM drones this year and flew 18 TDU flights. These figures represent only part of the effort put forth by the personnel of FLECOMPRON EIGHT during 1974.

In August, we sent one of our DP-2E aircraft to Lake City, Florida for a PAR. This was the first P-2 to be inducted in the P-2 PAR Program in over two years. During these two years, aircraft coming due for PAR were continually extended in service for three-month intervals.

Our Maintenance Department implemented a phased maintenance inspection system for our A-4C and SH-3G aircraft. Thus far, the new system is functioning smoothly and it will hopefully increase our aircraft availability.

The squadron has formed a new Corrosion Control Work Center. This was designed to increase the productivity and effectiveness of our Corrosion Control Program.

VC-8 achieved an all-time high first term re-enlistment rate of 58% and maintained a career retention rate of 100%.

VC-8 football team emerged victorious in the Tenth District Tournament by defeating Guantanamo Bay 20-12 and NAVSTA Roosevelt Roads 22-14. This enabled the team to go to Little Creek, Virginia for the Forces Afloat Championship and we placed third in the eight-team field that competed in the Championship games.