



▶ **“BACK TO THE BOAT”
VFA-204**
LCDR “PEP” PIRRONE
DISCUSSES THE CHALLENGES
OF A SQUADRON GOING BACK
TO SEA AFTER ELEVEN YEARS...



▶ **“YEAR IN REVIEW”
LSO SCHOOL OIC**
CDR “POTZO” POTHIER DISCUSSES
THE GOODS AND OTHERS OF 2013...

▶ **THE LSO SCHOOL WEB-
SITE HAS MOVED!**
SEE THE INSTRUCTIONS ON
HOW TO FIND IT AGAIN...

December 2013



Paddles *quarterly*

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE LSO COMMUNITY
THROUGH SAFETY DISCUSSIONS, OPERATIONAL
UPDATES, AND HISTORICAL READINGS.

BACK TO THE BOAT

Discussion of taking a squadron back to sea after eleven years

In September 2013, the “River Rattlers” of VFA-204, as the Navy’s only Strategic Reserve Strike Fighter Squadron, executed a highly successful day and night Carrier Qualification detachment to NAS Oceana and USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71). Based out of NAS JRB New Orleans, Louisiana, the River Rattlers demonstrated the capabilities needed to execute a rapid carrier deployment in support of the Active Duty Fleet. The first such CQ evolution for the squadron in over 11 years would not have been possible without extensive support from numerous commands, and clearly demonstrated that the River Rattlers are ready to support and defend the Constitution when called.

Efforts toward a full squadron CQ began in Spring ’13 with small groups of maintainers attending FRS CQ dets as guests of VFA-106 and VFA-122. Many River Rattler Sailors with little or no boat experience earned flight deck observer and final checker afloat qualifications. The next step was to put the quals to work with a VFA-204 pilot at the controls. CDR Kelly “Sully” Sullivan, a former Air National Guard UH-1, A-10 and F-15C pilot with no boat experience went TAD along with 10 Sailors and one River Rattler F/A-18A+ to VFA-106 for the April FRS Boat Det onboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77). VFA-106 and their Paddles Shop provided tremendous FCLP and underway training, helping CDR Sullivan to fully day/night qualify, while providing some great underway training for the River Rattler Sailors.

In addition to resetting the boat clock for pilots and maintainers, at the start of CY2013, VFA-204 did not have a single LSO inside the 12-month waving currency window. River Rattler Executive Officer, CDR Mark “Sheryl” Crowe attended the April det as the VFA-204 OIC, dusted off his former AIRLANT Paddles, and obtained waving currency while managing to bag a couple day traps as well.



BACK TO THE BOAT (cont)

While the River Rattler “mini det” was onboard BUSH, there was a significant effort underway back home to temporarily move an IFLOLS to NAS JRB New Orleans for a full squadron FCLP. The River Rattlers were penciled in to share deck time with CVW-1 following ROOSEVELT’S deck cert in September. However, unless an IFLOLS could be moved to NAS JRB New Orleans, the River Rattlers faced a five week FCLP detachment with a total bill upwards of \$500K. With support from CNAFR, CTSW and NAS JRB New Orleans, an IFLOLS was shipped from NAS Key West to NAS JRB New Orleans and certified one week prior to the start of FCLPs.

Once the IFLOLS puzzle was solved, a training plan had to be developed for the River Rattler pilots. With the exception of CDR Sullivan, all VFA-204 Full Time Support and Selected Reserve pilots fell into the initial or transition qual window. Pilot background included an Air Force F-16 transition pilot with no boat experience, two Fleet F-14 Tomcat pilots, and a Fleet EA-6B Prowler pilot, all of whom had plenty of flight time in the F/A-18A+, but never carrier qualified in Model. Those pilots who did have Fleet Hornet experience included a Fleet USMC F/A-18D pilot with only 16 traps (initial FRS CQ), and all were well outside of four years since their last night trap in Model. The safest approach was to conduct a comprehensive CQ syllabus with all required Computer Based Training, CQ phase lectures, simulators and FCLP periods completed prior to designating the squadron safe for CQ. The F-14, F-16 and EA-6B transition pilots needed 12 lectures, 6 simulators and 18 bounce periods, while those in the transition qual window required approximately half that number of sims and FCLPs.

To oversee the syllabus, three current Training Qualified LSOs volunteered for TAD assignments to VFA-204 both for FCLPs and the underway CQ period. LT Kyle “Mooch” Jones and LT Austin “Strobes” Hulbert joined the River Rattlers in New Orleans from VFA-106 while LT Dave “BEKE” Frank came down from the LSO School. Four LSOs from VFA-204 attended a refresher course at the LSO School prior to the beginning of FCLPs. This course consisted of classroom instruction and LSO simulator training, and CDR Matthew “Potzo” Pothier and his crew helped the River Rattler LSOs to get back up to speed.

CDR Kurt “Beavis” McClung, currently the NAS JRB New Orleans Operations Officer and guest River Rattler pilot/LSO commented “when you’re at a point in your career that you think your waving days are behind you, it gives you a great sense of appreciation to have an opportunity like this.” CDR McClung remarked that it was awesome to have a chance to learn some LSO academics from CDR Pothier, who was a junior LSO on his wave team over a decade ago in the Fleet.

During FCLPs, River Rattler jets that hadn’t seen an aircraft carrier in 11 years were groomed by the finest Maintenance department in the Navy. Over a three-week period (late August to early September ’13) 20 pilots flew 212 FCLP sorties at home field. The River Rattlers, now safe for CQ, detached to NAS Oceana with six F/A-18A+ aircraft, and reset the FCLP to trap clock with a day bounce at NOLF Fentress.



BACK TO THE BOAT (cont)

CQ began the morning of Tuesday 17 September with River Rattler Commanding Officer, CDR Brian “Beacon” Hennessy executing the first touch and go, and CDR Abaxes “Chili” Williams getting the first trap on an independent River Rattler CQ detachment since 2002. In all, the River Rattlers flew 68 CQ sorties, completed 29 day touch & go’s and 178 traps (137 day, 41 night) in a three-day period. CDR Hennessy went 6,287 days, or slightly over 17 years, without a night trap until he snagged the 2-wire on the clear-sky full-moon night of 18 September. CDR Hennessy commented “The traps are the easy part; it’s the bouncing, sims, logistics, maintenance on 25 year old Hornets, and lots of support from other Commands that got VFA-204 here. Eight months ago we didn’t have even one Pilot, Sailor or LSO qualified for CV ops, now we are making it look easy.”

Squadron performance was solid behind the boat. Pilots primarily assigned to the squadron earned a 3.25 squadron GPA, 99% boarding rate with no technique or pattern waveoffs. Four pilots fully qualified – two initial quals, one transition qual, and one re-qual guest LSO from VFA-106. All pilots earned at least a day-only qual, while everyone designated to CQ day and night obtained at least one night trap. Were it not for the loss of a day and a half of CQ for CVN OPS cancellations, and a hard scheduled in-port date, all pilots were tracking to fully qualify.

The River Rattlers would like to thank CNAF, CNRFC, CNIC, CNAL, NAVAIR, CSG-12, USS Theodore Roosevelt, CVW-1, CNAFR, CTSW, NAS JRB New Orleans, NAS Key West, VFA-106, VFA-122, LSO School and Carrier Schedules for the outstanding and essential support throughout this evolution.

LCDR Rigel “Pep” Pirrone



ORM Nightmare—The all O-5 wave team

L to R: CDR “Potzo” Pothier, CDR “Beavis” McClung, CDR “Sheryl” Crowe

YEAR IN REVIEW

Aloha Carrier Aviationland. We've had a busy year around the platform, as such, the following is an overview of issues that we have been working on during 2013. Even though there is no money in our DOD coffers, we work for beer and that still seems to be flowing. We continue to train LSOs and refine their skills to earn the opportunity to lead an airwing as CAG Paddles. We're working hard to update and upgrade our LSO doctrine, equipment and training. We've also had the opportunity to head out on the platform and travel to support our cause. One of the best parts of this job is the connection that we have to the Old School. We celebrate our pioneers and our grand masters and revel in the fact that what we do allows one of the most difficult things in all of aviation to appear routine. We trap people aboard aircraft carriers every 45 seconds. If you are a fellow Tailhooker, that is no big deal to you; you do it every day all cruise. For those who have not worked in this demanding environment, what we do seems extraordinary. On the many occasions that we've had over the past year to talk about and improve the LSO profession, we've been constantly reminded about how cool our job really is and it's impressive working with all the humble young paddles who perform spectacularly at sea, under pressure.

Over the past year, we collaborated with Brazil, India and France, and worked with Doctors, CEOs, COOs from the healthcare field, industry, and the media. We trapped Robot hookers, old guy hookers from VFA-204, revamped our NATOPS manuals, instituted more thorough LSO training, and on multiple occasions we've been graciously supported by Boom, OB, and Walt at the Pungo Military Aviation Museum. We've hosted Corsair pilot reunions, 4 Star Admirals who provided their insight into waving, the pilot of the S-3 in the Enterprise fiasco who talked about his survival, and also an Author, Juli Harlan, to support her research for a book on one of our Grand Masters, Bug Roach. We're also sending "Monkey" Parks on an IA to Mali to be Force Paddles Africa so look out for Deep Thoughts by Monkey over the next few issues. All these different events have helped refine the way we view ourselves as LSOs and shaped the way we believe we can improve our community. This refreshed interest allows us to keep a positive outlook on things, especially amidst this environment where one is supposed to do more with less. Recognizing the current situation for what it is relative to all these other events just mentioned, has forced us to put it all into perspective. If we stop worrying about new toys and work with what we've got, we can make it happen, we've always done it, and we always will. Below are some reflections from these events and a summary of what we've learned.

We travelled to Brazil; I know everyone feels bad for us for that one, thanks for your pity. What we saw there was a group of naval Aviators, no different from us. They've all been through our pipeline and have at least 10 traps on our boats, but these guys have no working aircraft carrier to continue their careers and they've been waiting for it for over 8 years. They only have 2 lenses, one on the ship and one at their FCLP field. They plan to make do with what they've got and they are continuing to look our way for some LSO guidance and support when the opportunities arise to get some deck time. It was great to head down to the Southern Hemisphere, wave some A-4s, navigate some head high faces, and watch Finch demonstrate his keen foreign relations skills.

Did you know that Doctors don't have crew rest, nor do they formally brief or debrief complex life and death procedures? Heck, beer barrel had more standard safety procedures than that. Hasn't the medical community proven that people make more mistakes when they are tired than when they are under the influence? In our aviation community we often complain that we don't take advantage of the lessons learned process to improve what we do, but it is quite interesting that the medical profession

YEAR IN REVIEW (cont)

that studies performance routinely plans to perform their duties in less than desirable operating conditions. Hopefully they didn't mess up the original prognosis.

The Corsair pilots we hosted cut their teeth literally cutting their engines to get aboard the mighty aircraft carrier. Their scan was; water, water, wood, chop power and make a play for the wires. Paddles were out there on the back of the ship wagging their arms and body around to assist using their handmade flags. Heck, the new mirror, deck edge lighting and even a radio was a major technological advance in their careers, never mind all the equipment we have on the platform now.

Bug did not have IFLOLS, LSODS, Moriah, ADMACS, ISIS, SATCC, or LRLS. How many crazy pitching deck talk-downs and barricades did he safely guide his pilots back aboard through? Bug waved more of those himself than the total number of barricades that the entire US Navy has conducted since he left the platform. Yes Bug did have a great mustache to assist him through these difficult times, so we asked BEKE to see if a great stash would make him a better paddles. The study was inconclusive, but he did seem to get more respect when Mike (yes his mustache earned a name) was on his face.

VFA-204 brought their reserve squadron out to the TR to rehack their carrier qualification currency. One of their pilots hadn't seen the boat since the 90's, and a few of them had never trapped in a Hornet. What they did have was experience and a sense of respect for the carrier environment. As such, they battled through challenging conditions and were solid behind the back end of the ship. While some were not battling for Top Ten spots, none were in the dirty dozen, and for the lot of them their night time performance reminded them about why we have LSOs on the platform in the first place.

When we compare some of these issues to the current concerns we have, they don't seem as dire as our angry JO's passionately argue about. I'm not saying I disagree with the passionate arguments either, that is the fire that fuels the good JOs to get even better, so keep it up. Sometimes it is good to step back and look at the big picture. It's all about perspective. I'd love new toys to make embarked fixed wing operations safer, faster, more reliable, but the bottom line is we work with danger. We revel in danger, it's what makes us better. Living on the edge isn't just an Aerosmith song; it's a way of life for Naval Aviators. The danger we face today is different from the dangers faced in years past, but it is no less real and if we screw up, people still die. "Walleye" Wallace's story of survival after his jet was smashed into by a Prowler in the landing area of the Enterprise really brings that point into focus. We must respect that danger and strive to be the best LSOs in the fleet.

The carrier aviation world is still the most demanding and coolest environment that a pilot can operate in. Every superpower and developing nation strives to accomplish what we make look routine. We make it look routine because of the passion and professionalism you bring to the platform as well as the blue skies around it. At the school house, we will continue to highlight our deficiencies and trust that our leaders holistically procure what is best for the long term. We plan to tighten up our training and procedures to provide a more thorough template for success for our profession. We will focus on tangible improvements within our LSO community and strive to achieve things within our grasp, but unfortunately, we're low on beer and Worm is out of town. So we're going to need some help.

CDR "Potzo" Pothier

What's ahead...

IFGT:

03-14 February
10-21 March
21 Apr-02 May

TFGT:

15-16 January
04-05 March

AFGT:

28-30 January
Call us to schedule

Air Boss:

13-15 January
17-19 February

All classes begin at 0900 on the convening date, building 150, NAS Oceana. Orders should be handled through squadron or CAG admin. Contact YN1 Gates with any administrative questions.



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LSO SCHOOL WEBSITE

The LSO School Website has been moved to a new portal that requires users to have their own SharePoint account. Approval time is usually 1-2 days.

Instructions to get an account are at:

<https://www.portal.navy.mil/comnavairfor/Pages/SPresources.aspx>

-If you are deployed, just use your contact info for your home station

-Staff code means N number (i.e. N3 for OPS)

-The DOD ID number is on the back of your CAC card (same number that is displayed when you pull your CAC out of the computer)

The new LSO School website address is:

<https://usff.portal.navy.mil/sites/cnal-cmds/LSO/default.aspx>

-Use your email certificate to logon

Visit us online at
<https://usff.portal.navy.mil/sites/cnal-cmds/LSO/default.aspx>

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