

Comments on VQ-5 Disestablishment  
by Gil Bouffard

**"NO WONDER THEY CALLED IT A WHALE"**

Friday, June 4th, 1999, started as a gray and partly cloudy morning at NAS North Island, California. The weather sort of epitomized the feeling of most of the participants and spectators at the disestablishment ceremonies for Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron FIVE.

The Navy, for the second time, has deprived its battle group and other operational commanders, of a mission responsive tactical intelligence tool. This tool is the aircraft carrier borne ES-3A Shadow operated by Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron FIVE, based in San Diego, California. The Pacific Fleet's aircraft carrier borne tactical electronic intelligence squadron's short (1991-1999) yet illustrious career has been cut short, not because of a lack of need, nor as its predecessor, the venerable EA-3B Skywarrior, aircraft age and fatigue, but rather economics! At least that's what "the powers that be," would have you believe.

In the late Eighties the Navy removed the aging EA-3B Skywarrior from aircraft carrier operations. However, the EA-3B continued in operation into the early Nineties flying from land bases. The Skywarrior crews supported the Gulf War before finally being retired from active service. The Skywarrior was nearly forty years old when it stood down.

The Navy has decided that tactical electronic intelligence is too expensive! Therefore, they have determined that the ES-3A Shadow is no longer necessary! They plan on relying on the overtaxed Rivet Joint RC-135, the U-2 and the EP-3 Aries aircraft, all landbased. There may come a day when the Navy learns just how expensive not having intelligence really is.

As the first ES-3A Sea Shadow tactical electronic intelligence squadron to be activated, it fell to the men and women of VQ-5 to be the first to shut down. Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron SIX, the Atlantic Coast based sister squadron will close down in September.

In a flag festooned hangar bay, surrounded on each side by an ES-3A Shadow and a special guest aircraft, Commander Andy Eddowes, Squadron Executive Officer, presided over the proceedings. This marks the second time that the Navy has abandoned the mission of carrier borne tactical electronic intelligence support to the fleet commander. The special guest aircraft, which stood in silent observation as the centerpiece of the ceremony, was an A-3 Skywarrior, (N578HA, actually an NRA-3B, Buno 144825. This aircraft formerly graced the flight line at Point Mugu and was known as "Snoopy."), graciously flown over from Van Nuys, CA., by Raytheon specifically for the event. More later.

Speakers included Captain Jansen Buckner, Commander, Sea Control Wings, U.S Pacific Fleet; Captain John Teates (pronounced "Tates."), Deputy Director for Transnational Warfare at the Defense Intelligence Agency and the first commander of VQ-5, and Vice Admiral Mike Bowman, Commander, Naval Air Forces. U.S Pacific Fleet.

The final speaker, Commander Spencer L. Miller, Commander, Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron FIVE, gave an excellent farewell speech, reminding us of the mission completed and missions yet to come and thanking all squadron mates past and present for a job well done.

The ceremony had special significance for me as I have supported the squadron since the beginning, not that I haven't supported VQ-6, but I could always count on VQ-5 for the Association of Old Crows ISR conference and briefings to the Golden Gate Chapter of the AOC. Additionally, I was especially proud to have had some involvement in arranging the visit of the Raytheon A-3 Skywarrior for the squadron's disestablishment. There were a lot of whalers in attendance and they all looked a bit wistful as the aircraft fired up to leave.

Many of the young sailors had only heard stories of the mythical whale. Their comments were very interesting ranging from awe that the whale went aboard carriers, and "Its so big!" to "Its ugly!" It didn't matter what they said. They were all impressed! There will come a day when their hair is thinning or gray and their stomach is a bit paunchy and they are standing on a flight line somewhere listening to young sailors talk about the ES-3A Shadow in the same way.

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