

## White Shirts

LCDR John A. Williams, USN (Ret.)

In 1959, as an enlisted bombardier/navigator (AQC) in VAH-6, our whole squadron of 12 A3D-2s was deployed on USS *Ranger*. The deck was certainly full. This was the first WestPac deployment of the new *Forrestal* class super carriers. Our Skywarriors were usually the first launched and last recovered.

The air wing was flying off to shore prior to the carrier's arrival in Yokosuka, Japan. Just as one of our A3Ds was in tension and powered up, the ship ran into a heavy rain squall and PriFly ordered the launch suspended.

As the rain became heavier the pilot raised his flaps and was spun off the cat and directed aft of the island, one of our parking places. No sooner was the bird back there the ship broke into the clear. The air boss said, "Put that Whale back on the track and let's get rid of him!" So the Skywarrior returned to the cat, was hooked up, and the pilot went to 100% power. He issued a salute and off went the A3D. WITH THE FLAPS UP! The aircraft dipped so low it left a wake in the water but staggered to gain altitude and headed for the beach.

All hell broke loose in PriFly. The Air Boss called our skipper, the catapult officer and our line chief to meet with the ship's CO on the bridge ASAP. Ranger's Captain (later admiral) was A.M. Noel Gayler. He put the cat officer, our pilot and a few others in hack.

The next day of flight operations we saw white flight deck jerseys all over the deck during launches. The men wearing them were from each squadron's Quality Control branch. Stencilled across the front of each jersey was the word "FLAPS" in

four-inch letters. These white-shirted sailors were to stand close to the cat officer on each and every launch. Shortly, the addition of a black checkerboard pattern was added to the shirts. Therefore, I believe the spring of 1959 saw the birth of the first white-shirted "safety checkers."

*Editors note: LCDR Williams responded to a query concerning the origin of colored jerseys on the flight deck. His article focuses on one of the colors. LCDR Williams served in the Navy for 29 years and rose from Seaman to LCDR, and plane captain to Maintenance Officer, among many other accomplishments. He logged over 2,500 flight hours.*