

## A Cold War Naval Deployment: 1962 - 1963

### Set Condition Quebec . . .

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1962, the attack aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk (CVA63) was deployed to the Western Pacific as a component of the United States Seventh Fleet. I was a crewmember of Kitty Hawk at that time. This was the peak day of the Cuban Missile Crisis. At reveille that morning, as soon as I stood up from my bunk, I could discern an unusual condition. We were 'wallowing'. An eighty-four-thousand-ton vessel does not wallow. To employ a nautical term, we were 'underway with no way on'. During the night we had rendezvoused with a large fleet oil tanker, USS Hassayampa (AO145). As we had refueled the previous week, we should not have required replenishment for another two to three weeks. Also, it is not usual to rendezvous at night. Tankers have schedules. A 'receiving' ship steams up to the tanker at a specific day and hour – unless there is an emergency – and there was.

At 07:30 that morning the usual announcement for that time was made over the 1MC (number 1 method of communication), the 'squawk box'. All announcements are preceded by a call on the Bosun's pipe, in this case the two-note '**Attention**'. Then the announcement itself; in this case "Now quarters for muster and inspection. Muster on station." This meant personnel would report to their Division's main office or work area. (Depending on the "crowdedness", by aircraft, the order might have been "Now quarters for muster and inspection. Hangar-Deck parade.") In that situation, of the four-thousand five-hundred men in the crew, perhaps three-thousand eight-hundred, all those who were not actually on watch, would proceed to their assigned places there, grouped by Department and Division. In either case, the muster would be taken and the ship's 'Plan of the Day' would be read to all hands. Nothing unusual was mentioned and this was the time when any special news or instructions would be promulgated. Division Officers would report the muster and completion of the reading to the respective Department Heads. At 07:50 the bugler would play 'Officers Call'. The Department Heads would then report to the Commanding Officer (the Captain.) This was routine. At 08:00 the announcement "Commence ship's work" would be made. Another day officially begins.

However, this was not just another day. At 08:30 the 1MC broadcast a different prelude. This was a quite long call on the bosun's pipe. It is unmistakable: "**Attention All Hands!**" This usually means only one thing, and sure enough, the announcement was "**General Quarters! General Quarters! All Hands Man Your Battle Stations.**" This was followed by the bugle call which many would recognize from Western movies: 'Boots and Saddles'. In the Navy it means 'Battle Stations'. This was followed by the 'gong – gong – gong' of the General Alarm. Reflexively, you run to your assigned station. Ship's traffic rules apply: forward and up to starboard, aft and down to port. I had been at Radar Room #1, situated on the 010 level (pronounced 'oh ten') the uppermost deck on the ship, ten decks above the Hangar Deck which is the first or main deck. I had to get to the ship's Combat Information Center (CIC) located on the 02 level – eight decks down and approximately 500 feet forward. An announcement is made each minute from the beginning of GQ. At four minutes the order "**Set Condition Zebra**" is given. Every door and hatch on the ship is closed. The ship is 'buttoned up'. If you have not reached your GQ station by that time, you've got a problem. Each major armored hatch or watertight door is guarded by a team of men from the ship's "R" or Repair Division. They are in communication with Damage Control Central. They must request permission from that center to open the hatch to let you through. If given, they do so, and then report that the hatch is again secure.

The 'drill' that morning was unusually long, and, as it developed, it was not a drill. All announcements were directed to the Air Department and the Carrier Air Group (the squadrons). Then, at 10:30 another instruction was broadcast; one I had not heard previously: "**Set Condition Quebec. This is not a drill. Repeat. Set Condition Quebec. This Is Not A Drill.**" As my Division Officer's GQ station was in the same location as mine, I queried him as to its meaning. His reply: "**Load the nukes.**"

Twenty-two years later I made the acquaintance of a retired Naval officer who had been a Lieutenant Commander on board Kitty Hawk at the time, and was the aircraft commander of a Douglas A3 Skywarrior, the largest navy bomber. When I asked him just how close to war we had come, he replied: "In the squadron ready rooms we had received 'the envelopes'". The envelopes contained the specific targeting information for that particular aircraft. Over the past fifty years I have mentioned this event to a small number of people. Some of them asked me what contribution the Kitty Hawk, being deployed off the coast of Asia, could possibly make to the Cuban missile situation. They had not grasped the fact that we were ten minutes away from World War III. Our assignment was to strike the United States' opponents in that continent. Fortunately, at 11:30, the order was given: "**Secure From Condition Quebec.**" The nuclear weapons were disarmed and returned to the magazines. At 12:00 we secured from General Quarters.

### Freedom Is Not Free

#### Christmastime

In the timeframe surrounding Christmas, Kitty Hawk experienced a number of special events. Two of them were peaceful and pleasant; one was business. The ship had acquired about 25 pine trees. These were distributed to the various Departments and the Aviation Squadrons. Operations Department's tree was set up in the Combat Information Center. It was decorated with the materials on hand: chains of paper links, paper Christmas trees, and angels, etc. On Sunday, December 23, while at sea, we had a VIP visit. He was Francis, Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York and Bishop of the Roman Catholic Military Vicariate. Cardinal Spellman arrived by helicopter and while on board celebrated Catholic

Mass on the Hangar Deck. About 1,200 men attended the service. His visit was short as he had a number of other ships to visit. As his helicopter lifted-off from the Flight Deck, it momentarily lost power and plummeted over the side. The several hundred men who had been standing topside to see him off rushed to the side expecting to see a disaster just as it happened. With immense relief we saw the helicopter as it rose back up. The pilot had made a recovery. (Deo Gratias.)

The day after Christmas we headed into port at Subic Bay, The Philippines, the large US Navy base there. Our ship had been selected to host one of Bob Hope's Christmas shows for military personnel. As always, it was well done. Having been assigned Shore Patrol duty in the town of Olongapo though, I got to see only a few minutes of the show before going to my assignment. As a sizable wooden stage had been constructed on the Flight Deck, when the show was over and the performers had left the ship, there came the cleanup. Perhaps 200 men were assigned to walk the deck, shoulder to shoulder, to pick-up any item of debris that might have been left from that structure. A single nail, if sucked into a jet engine could result in the loss of a million-dollar piece of equipment, or, if blown back could be a 'bullet' if it hit someone.

On Christmas Day itself, all hands were treated to a nice little gift from the Supply Department via the Air Group. A large bomber had been rigged with a cargo platform in its bomb bay and flown to Hawaii. It returned with fresh milk. All hands were treated to two half pints of same with their Christmas dinner, the only such milk we had on that seven-month cruise. (Everything else was powdered or canned.)

But the ship was at sea; we were on duty. Shades of Pearl Harbor. Not everyone can relax on a holiday. More than 'at sea', we were at Readiness Condition One.

#### [On Guard - Readiness Condition One](#)

Perhaps five hundred men were required to be on duty to maintain this degree of readiness.

#### [On the Flight Deck](#)

This meant that an F4H, The McDonnell Aircraft Company's Phantom II air-superiority fighter was positioned on each of the ship's four aircraft catapults. The pilot and the radar intercept officer (the GIB or 'guy in back') were seated in the cockpits. They were only allowed to stretch their legs and stand alongside the aircraft; this for a four-hour duty tour. The flight deck had to be configured for a launch; except for those on the catapults, all aircraft had to be moved aft. The catapult crews, 'green shirts', were standing-by the launching bridles and hold-back assemblies. As the aircraft engines were periodically started and run for a few minutes Aviation Machinist Mates Jet, 'blue shirts', observed the engine instrumentation to determine that everything was in order. Following these start-ups, the Aviation Boatswain Mates Fuel, 'red shirts', would top-off the fuel tanks once more. Still other personnel would be manning the 'mules'. These were yellow-painted tow tractors with a turbine engine blower that was necessary to 'spin-up' the Phantom's engines to get them started. Aviation Boatswain Mates Handlers 'brown shirts') were standing by at all the 'hard points' of the aircraft. Tie-down chains anchored the aircraft and the 'yellow gear' starting engines to the flight deck. Nothing is left to gravity. Similarly, a rescue helicopter was on standby with its flight crew and one or more UDT (Underwater Demolition Team ((frogmen))) rescue swimmers. The helicopter performed its own warmup and refueling procedures.

Then there are the 'cows'. We had to do our own aerial refueling. Whenever an aircraft was launched, a refueling tanker (one of our bombers carrying an air-to-air refueling pod and wing tanks loaded with fuel) followed it into the air. This practice was an immediate replenishment of the significant amount of fuel required to take off and climb to altitude ... which, in turn, necessitated re-configuring the flight deck to land the refueling tanker aircraft. All aircraft had to be moved forward to clear the landing zone. When any flying evolution is conducted, the guys in the white shirts with red crosses on them (Hospital Corpsmen) were present among the numerous flight deck personnel. Just inside the island superstructure was located Flight Deck Aid Station, a completely equipped and manned operating room theater.

#### [Combat Information Center \(The Electronics Heart Of The Ship\)](#)

The ship had three long-range search radars, one of which could see 'over the horizon'. Between them, approaching aircraft from as far away as 340 miles could be detected and tracked. If an aircraft came within 165 miles its altitude as well as range and bearing became known. IFF equipment (Identification, Friend or Foe) helped differentiate between known friendlies and 'bogies', unidentifiable aircraft. OI Division (Operations Intelligence) personnel, Radarmen, were manning their 'scopes'. Information on everything in our search area was displayed to the CIC Officer. If an aircraft was deemed a potential threat one of our radars would supply positional data electronically to guided missile control radar sets. We had four of these, one for each of four missiles mounted on two twin launchers. If fired, the missile was not 'on its own', it was a 'beam rider' and would be steered from the ship all the way to target. If a threat were detected, fighters would be launched and directed to the incoming aircraft. In CIC's Air Warfare module, very capable operators would 'vector' our fighters to intercept these threats. This could be done farther away from the ship than our missile battery could reach. But if they got past the outer defenses, they were exposed to the missiles.

#### [The Missile Batteries](#)

Traditionally, naval gunnery systems are maintained by GMs, Gunners Mates. With the advent of missiles, the GM rating had to specialize into two types: GMGs and GMMs (Gunners Mates Guns and Gunners Mates Missiles). The hardware of the two, needless to say, bears no relation, one to the other. But on the Kitty Hawk we also had need of the third type of Gunners Mate: the GMTs or Gunners Mate Technician. The GMTs were nuclear weapons personnel whose rating was somewhat disguised under the umbrella of GM. Being exposed to the missiles was something an opponent really didn't

want to experience. You see, our missiles not only had a range of one hundred miles, but they were also of a type whose designation ended in 'A3'. Yes, the warhead was a nuclear device. It only needed to come within a number of miles to down a whole squadron of bogeys. Kitty Hawk's missile battery, while training at the Pacific Missile Range, had fired a shot which punched right through the wing of the target drone aircraft. (While at the range, telemetry equipment, not live ammunition, reports the proximity/accuracy of the shot.)

#### *Main Propulsion Control*

The ship's Engineering Department gets a workout whenever Flight Quarters is called for. It is typically necessary to work speed up to twenty-five knots or more from the usual 'economic cruising speed' of fifteen knots. This speed was augmented by the ship's heading directly into the wind producing a 'wind across the deck' of forty knots or so. That 'boost' greatly aids the launch and recovery of aircraft. While at Readiness Condition One, though, that speed must be maintained continually.

Orders from the Navigation Bridge are transmitted, not to the engine rooms directly, but to Main Propulsion Control. This is the Engineering heart of the ship. The Engineering Officer of the Watch is seated on what is almost a throne. He faces a bulkhead where indicators display what the engine-order-telegraph has commanded. There, also, are gauges displaying the steam pressure on each of the ship's eight boilers, and the RPMs of each of the four propeller shafts. The four propellers are not all of the same type. The two outboard props are of a type called 'maneuvering', while the inboard ones are 'high-speed' types. This means that the two types of propellers must turn at different RPMs in order to 'pull' evenly. The Engineering Officer of the Watch interprets the command from the 'bridge' and then causes specific instructions to be sent to each of the four engine rooms instructing the 'throttle watch' to open valves to apply the appropriate amount of steam to produce the desired/required shaft RPMs.

#### *Showing The Stick*

Sometime in January 1963, the Kitty Hawk was a major player in showing 'the stick' to our adversaries. An exercise was planned and executed which required most of the Seventh Fleet. This would be several days in length and would range, generally, to the south of our area of responsibility, i.e., the South China Sea. Per an operations schedule, Kitty Hawk left the port of Yokosuka, Japan, but in late afternoon rather than early morning. And so, we proceeded out of port into Tokyo Bay and then further, into Sagami Bay. By then, it was fully night. The ship 'hove to' (stopped). A tugboat towed a barge with a canvas covered cargo out to us. Our large crane lifted the "cargo" from the barge and on to a 'deck-edge' elevator from which the item could be moved into the Hangar Deck. This was done with all lighting on that deck extinguished. Once inside, the hangar bay doors to the outside were closed and lights could be lit inside the ship. The cargo was a Lockheed U2 reconnaissance aircraft. What? No U2 had ever previously been flown from an aircraft carrier. It wouldn't work! No way! However, aeronautical engineers said it could be done. And so, it was.

Kitty Hawk steamed south with the 7<sup>th</sup> fleet for several days, during which time we took on board an A3D-Q, a heavy bomber. The 'Q' suffix indicated that it was configured to carry 'electronic countermeasures' (ECM) equipment. This was to augment that already installed aboard the ship (which carried the greatest complement of electronic equipment afloat in the Pacific Ocean). We monitored every 'command' channel of 'the other side' to ascertain whether we had been detected, or not. And then our true mission began. It was twofold. We, and two escorting destroyers, went to 'electronic silence'. Everything / anything that might emit a signal in the radio frequency spectrum was powered off. Kitty Hawk and escorts separated from the fleet and proceeded northward towards the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia. When in position, the U2 was brought up to the Flight Deck and prepared for launching. As this was not an aircraft of Naval Air Force design, it would not be capable of being launched with benefit of a catapult. (The ship's catapults were 250 feet long, and could accelerate our heaviest aircraft [gross take-off weight of approximately 90,000 pounds] to a speed of, say, 200 knots in that distance.) No. Instead the full flight deck length of 1,104 feet was made available for a take-off roll. Upon signal from the U2 pilot that he was ready, the command to proceed was given. That aircraft required only half the length of the flight deck before it reached flying speed. It climbed to about 500 feet, made one circle of the ship at that altitude, and then 'shot' upwards and proceeded on its mission. (We learned later that it landed at the US airbase in Incirlik, Turkey. Its mission was not divulged to us.)

But all was not over. About one hour after the U2 departed the area, we launched all aircraft from both of our squadrons of fighters. These were (12) F4H McDonnell Phantom IIs, and (12) F8U Vought Crusaders. Then we 'lit off' all of our electronics: Search radars, Fire Control radars, high-power communications transmitters and the UHF radios of air-traffic-control (ATC). This was not nice of us. One's opponent does not like to discover that he had lost contact with a major offensive force, and to then discover that it was in his own back yard. In short order a fleet of our opponent's bomber aircraft overflew us, sometimes at masthead level. There was one such 'pass' where a four-engine heavy reconnaissance aircraft flew right up the axis of our flight deck ... with a Phantom II tucked close under him (seeming almost to be touching his underside with the Phantom's 'bubble' canopy), and blocking his camera ports. The announcement was made that no photographs were permitted of our and our opponent's actions. We were warned that Masters-at-Arms were instructed to confiscate any cameras seen being so employed. (Some time later, photographs were aired publicly of these happenings - photos taken by National Geographic.)

#### *Paying The Price*

During this seven-month deployment we lost eleven men killed.

### *First Casualty*

Prior to Kitty Hawk's deployment to WestPac we suffered our first operational fatality. While conducting night carrier flight operations training off of San Diego, a catapult crewman ran into the propeller of an aircraft which was positioning for launch. Despite being 'rescued' immediately by the Corpsmen, and taken to the Flight Deck Aid Station, the Airman died.

### *Crash On Takeoff*

We saw an F8U Crusader (fighter aircraft) that developed a mechanical problem immediately after launching, roll uncontrolledly to port. The pilot 'punched out' (ejected), but by the time he did so, his aircraft was inverted, and he was blown downward. The only remainder of the aircraft or the pilot was the 'bubble' canopy which floated for a few minutes and then sank.

### *Incredible Save*

On another occasion a single-engine bomber was on a catapult and about to be launched. With only one or two seconds to go in a sequence which, once started, cannot (apparently) be halted, the engine 'flamed-out' ... and fuel, since it continued to be pumped, resulted in a fire in the 'tail-pipe' of the aircraft. Several radio-delivered instructions and hand signals from the catapult officer admonished the pilot to 'punch out' (eject). Apparently, anticipating the 'exhilaration' of the rapid acceleration of a 'cat shot' the pilot did not immediately comprehend these warnings. By the time he did so, the launch had just begun, and the aircraft was traveling down the 250-foot length of the 'cat'. Since I have never experienced an ejection, I surmise that the explosive charge that blows the seat upward is sufficiently powerful to cause it to safely clear the tail section of the aircraft even when flying at a speed of several hundred miles-per-hour. In this instance the airspeed was modest, and so, the altitude gained by the ejection shot the pilot high enough that his parachute was able to deploy, and he floated right back onto the flight deck and landed on his feet.

### *Crash On Landing – A Double Loss*

On another occasion a fighter aircraft, while returning to the ship from a nighttime operation suffered a 'ramp-strike'. He was too low. The aircraft hull was just about at deck level and 'blew' across the deck, on fire, and flew into the water. (Aircraft and pilot were lost.) His landing gear, however, having been sheared off by the impact, inflicted some injuries to personnel whose duties place them in close proximity to landing aircraft. One such person was the aircraft commander I mentioned in the first paragraph of this memoir. One of his collateral duties was as a "squadron landing signal officer".

An LSO is an aviator who actually sees an aircraft's attitude while it is approaching to land and advises to raise or lower the nose, add or decrease power, or, if the approach does not appear to be salvageable and a safe landing made, to 'wave-off' and go around for another attempt. His station is a platform at the aftermost part of the ship and overhangs the port side. He is a member of the 'Ship's Company'. If a pilot has made more than one 'missed approach', an LSO from his own squadron will assume that function. Hearing a friendly voice from a guy who sits next to you in your squadron's Ready Room is likely to calm nerves and aid the process.

There are safety nets at the LSO platform. If an approaching aircraft appears to be endangering you, the LSO can dive backward into the net and slide to a protected area. But, as bad luck would have it, the LSO's escape was not quite fast enough. A piece of wreckage from the crashed aircraft struck his left leg as he was doing so and tore it off at the knee. He survived – but his Navy career was ended.

### *Man Overboard*

Yellow Shirts are (among other assignments) aircraft directors. In one evolution, when a plane has just landed, yellow shirts give taxiing instructions to the pilot directing him to the 'parking spot' allocated. Each director has a specific area of the flight deck for which he is responsible, and so, there are a number of such personnel in the view of the pilot. To prevent confusion as to which person's directions he is to follow, the pilot will see that one of them is holding his arms straight upwards, while the others have their arms folded across their chest. Through hand signals the subject director will bring the plane through his zone and will then kneel down on the deck and point to the next director. That person will then have raised his arms to the straight up position, while the first folds his arms across his chest thus indicating he is no longer the person to watch.

When an aircraft has landed and been halted by the arresting cable, the pilot must, of necessity, apply power to get his plane moving again. This must be done in a very controlled manner. The full power used at takeoff / launch would be a hurricane bowling personnel over in the tight quarters of the flight deck. And so, the pilot will 'goose' the engine and then immediately remove power and then do so again, as needed, to propel his plane forward.

On one occasion the yellow shirt first directing the pilot, whose back is now turned to the aircraft he has just handed off, lost his footing on the somewhat slippery flight deck and was blown off balance by the taxiing power bursts. (Quite often the bursts would be in sets of three. I recall frequently hearing the 'whump', 'whump', 'whump' of such actions.) The man was blown aft and off to the port side of the deck. There is a platform, officially called the 'gallery' deck, but generally referred to as the 'catwalk' almost completely lining the bow, stern, and sides of the flight deck. Where there is no catwalk there are steel-cable safety nets. As misfortune would have it, the man was blown to the one 'corner' where there was no safety net, and then over the side.

The flight deck is sixty-five feet above the ocean surface. A trained high diver swimmer might gracefully accomplish a jump from that height, but a man who is dressed in bulky clothing and not skilled in doing so is unlikely to survive such a fall, and he did not. Add to this, it was winter in the North Pacific. A Destroyer, steaming one mile behind the Kitty Hawk

in the 'lifeguard' station, retrieved his body. As many flight deck personnel wear a 'belt' type life preserver, inflated by a compressed air cartridge, he was floating when the lifeboat reached him.

Another dimension is added to this event. The entire action was 'captured' by the manned camera of the flight deck television system. Crewmen within range of a television set saw it live.

## Rendering Honors

### Presidential Visit

In June of 1963, President of the United States John F. Kennedy conducted a comprehensive inspection tour of military capabilities at west-coast bases.

### Navy Presentation

The Navy worked up a major demonstration of assets located in the San Diego area. On the appointed day, the President and his entourage began by viewing an antisubmarine warfare (ASW) exercise while on board the USS Hornet (CVS-12). Later, he transferred to the USS Kitty Hawk for the 'air power' portion of the presentation. The Kitty Hawk had recently returned from a seven-month deployment to the Far East (WestPac). Its Air Group had debarked and dispersed to their home stations; the Carrier Division Commander, a Rear-Admiral, and his staff had moved to facilities ashore. We were, essentially, an empty hulk (extensive maintenance work was underway on many of the ship's systems). Perfect. Static displays could be set up in the cavernous hangar bays; the Air Group's berthing areas were available for all the temporary personnel involved in the air show. Accordingly, on 'the day', with many units of the First Fleet involved, the exercise / demonstration began, at sea, off San Diego.

### Arrival Honors

As the ASW exercise neared its completion, higher-ranking military and civilians began transferring from the Hornet to the Kitty Hawk. For obvious safety reasons, only a single important personage would be transferred at one time in one helicopter, and so, it required a number of flights to do so. As each came aboard, honors were rendered appropriate to the person's rank. In addition to 'Side-Boys' (honor guard), Ruffles and Flourishes are played and the title of the persons command, not his name or rank, is announced over the 1MC, the general announcing system. Further, that person's flag is hoisted at the ship's yard arm.

### Rendering Honors

Returning to the arrival of 'Brass' aboard the Kitty Hawk, the first to be ferried across was the 'Commander, Naval Air Force, Pacific Fleet', a Rear-Admiral. The arrival announcement was passed as: "Naval Air Force, Pacific, arriving". His two-star flag was hoisted. Following this, Commander, First Fleet, a Vice-Admiral, came on board. Honors included the announcement, "First Fleet, arriving". The previously raised two-star flag was lowered, and a three-star flag was hoisted in its place. Next was the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). That announcement was, "United States Navy, arriving". His four-star flag replaced the three-star. Ultimately, President Kennedy arrived. In addition to the presidential flag replacing that of the CNO's four-star, the announcement made was: "UNITED STATES, ARRIVING."

Powerful.

### Hail To The Chief

Later that year we witnessed a different ceremonial for President Kennedy: the playing of the Presidential Honors music of "Hail To The Chief" at his funeral.

Sad. Freedom is not free.