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New CO Takes Flight of VFA- 115

By Lt. j.g. Nathan Bruschi, VFA-115 Public Affairs

CORAL SEA -- Cmdr. Shawn M. Kern relieved Cmdr. George M. Perry as commanding officer of the "Eagles" from the Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 115, July 28, during an airborne change of command ceremony aboard U.S. Navy's forward-deployed Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73).

"I'm thrilled to take command of the Eagles," said Kern. "Cmdr. Perry has set the squadron up for success and I'm excited for what lies ahead in the coming year. I have had so many great experiences serving in the Navy. I look forward to this chance to give back by promoting the Navy's mission abroad and helping the men and women of VFA-115 achieve their dreams."

Kern's, also known as "Bigs," current command tour is his third operational assignment in Japan. As a junior officer, he served with the "Dambusters" of VFA-195 completing six deployments aboard aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), flying combat missions in support of Operations Southern Watch and Iraqi Freedom. As a department head, he served with the "Golden Dragons" of VFA-192, accomplishing five additional deployments aboard Kitty Hawk and two aboard George Washington.

"Carrier Air Wing Five is the place to be for a fighter squadron," said Kern. "The high state of readiness and proximity to the mission afforded to the Navy's only permanently forward-deployed air wing mean each day here is filled with challenge and reward. In addition, I cherish the rich culture and tradition of Japan and the warm friendship of our Japanese allies."

"'Bigs' is going to be a phenomenal commanding officer," said Perry. "He's got the right outlook and demeanor. He's a real strategic thinker and the squadron will be in capable hands."

Perry's completion of his command tour is the last act in 20-year span of service for the career of a naval aviator. Upon returning to the U.S., Perry will retire from the Navy and embark on a second career as senior program director with a civilian aviation company.

"Getting the opportunity to command a fighter squadron has been a privilege and an honor," said Perry. "It's been the highlight of my career thus far. Transitioning from the Navy comes with mixed emotions. The chance to lead people and fly Navy jets was an incredible experience. In a way, I feel like I'm closing a book. I've read the last page of the book and now it's time to put it on the shelf. I'll recommend it for others but it is just time for me to start a new book"

The Eagles are one of the nine squadrons of Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 5 embarked on George Washington which is currently on its 2013 patrol in the 7th Fleet area of operations providing a combat-ready force that protects the collective maritime interest of the U.S. and its partners and allies in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

Since its founding in 1942, VFA-115 has left its mark flying in every U.S.-involved conflict in recent history – seeing combat at Okinawa and Leyte Gulf in World War II, Inchon and Chosin Reservoir in Korea, the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam, and Operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield, Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Today, the pilots of VFA-115 fly the advanced single-seat F/A-18E Super Hornet as part of forward-deployed naval forces in Atsugi, Japan.

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