VT-2 Remembers Instructor Pilot and Student Aviator tragically lost in October training event in Alabama

VT-2 honored and remembered two of their military members who died during a training event last month. VT-2 instructor pilot, Lt. Rhiannon Ross, and VT-2 student aviator, Ens. Morgan Garrett, took off from NAS Whiting Field on a routine training flight when the T-6B Texan II trainer aircraft crashed near Foley, Ala. on Oct. 23. VT-2 held memorial services for both military members. Garrett’s memorial service was held at the National Naval Aviation Museum Nov. 4, and Ross’s memorial service was held at the North Field hangar onboard NAS Whiting Field on Nov 6. The services were modified with limited attendees due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The late Lt. Rhiannon Ross, USN instructor pilot with the VT-2 “Doerbirds,” from Wixom, Mich.

The late Ens. Morgan Garrett, US Coast Guard student aviator for VT-2 “Doerbirds,” from Weddington, N.C.
The late military members were honored by Commanding Officer of VT-2, Cmdr. Wes Barnes. “It is with a heavy heart that I share the loss of two of our squadron members Friday evening, LT Rhiannon Ross and ENS Morgan Garrett. During a training mission, their T-6B crashed into a residential area near Foley, Ala. We are thankful no one on the ground was injured, but sadly neither crew member survived. Our sincerest condolences and prayers go out to the family members who have suffered this tremendous loss. I cannot express the devastation we all feel at this time. I’d like to personally thank all of the support we have received from family, friends and colleagues from all over. I encourage everyone to take care of each other and the families directly affected by this tragedy as we navigate through the healing process,” Barnes said in an announcement on the VT-2 Facebook page.

A display for the late Lt. Rhiannon Ross, USN, instructor pilot for the VT-2 “Doerbirds” during her memorial service on Nov. 6.

**Note: Photos and coverage were not available for the memorial service held for Ens. Morgan Garrett due to location and COVID-19 restrictions.
Whiting Field Fleet Fly-In Gives Aviation Students Peek at Future Aircraft

by Colin Warren-Hicks, Pens. News Journal

In a way, it’s kind of like returning to your old high school for homecoming.

Helicopter pilots stationed on Navy warships, Marine Corps bases and Coast Guard cutters across the country flew back this week to their old stomping grounds at Naval Air Station Whiting Field in Santa Rosa County.

The pilots with real-world experience under their wings returned for the annual Naval Helicopter Association Gulf Coast Fleet Fly-In, which brings together past and present students.

The professionals shared advice and offered flight school students tours of the interiors of their helicopters, giving students a better idea of the types of aircraft they one day might fly themselves.

“The value of the Fleet Fly-In event is that it adds to the students’ professional development,” said Cmdr. Patrick O’Neil, a commanding officer with the helicopter training program at Whiting Field. “Because when they finish their training here, what they are going to do is to make a career out of a certain community.”

All Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard helicopter pilots in the U.S. go through basic flight school at Whiting Field, and each student applies for and is ultimately assigned to more advanced training for a specific type of aircraft. The type of helicopter a pilot is trained to fly determines her or his “community” affiliation.

“Each community has different mission sets,” O’Neil said. “For each mission set, the community itself develops a persona that comes out with how we fly the aircraft, how we train the aircraft and how we manage our personnel.”

For instance, pilots who fly helicopters designed for attacking tactics, such as Hueys and Cobras, are part of a community known for offense, while pilots flying the MH-60 Romeo, designed for submarine detection and electronic warfare, are part of a community of aviators who specialize in support roles.

“They have to make an informed decision when they are choosing that community,” O’Neil said. “The Fleet Fly-In allows us to expose them to the options and will guide them in their decision that will dictate their next 10, 15, 20 years of their service.”

For a pilot, it’s a big decision.

Mike Schrader, a 25-year-old Marine Corps flight student from Hillsboro, Oregon, said he didn’t need the event to know which community was for him. Schrader said he is a serious but laidback guy, which makes the CH-53 community a good fit.

“The CH-53 community is known to be kind of more relaxed, easy-going guys, whereas the Marine Corps’ skid communities are known to be like super hard-chargers,” he said.

Not everyone is so certain, though. Standing on a Whiting Field flight deck Wednesday morning, Ronann Carrero Ortiz, a 25-year-old from Milton, said he still didn’t know what community would suit him.

Still in the initial stages of his training, Carrero Ortiz has yet to be officially assigned to either a helicopter or jet training program. Both programs are still options for him.

Carrero Ortiz always thought he wanted to fly fighter jets. But after touring one of the Navy’s Bell Boeing V-22 Ospreys and witnessing its vertical takeoff and
Navy’s 245th Birthday at NAS Whiting Field

NAS Whiting Field and Training Air Wing FIVE held a modified cake cutting ceremony celebrating the 245th birthday of the U.S. Navy Oct. 13. NASWF Commanding Officer, Deputy Commodore of TRAWING FIVE, the oldest and youngest active duty personnel cut the cake in Navy tradition.

Fly-In Event (cont.)

landing capabilities at the Fleet Fly-In, he said he was torn.

“It’s a battle between the missions versus the aircraft,” he said.

The 2020 Gulfcoast Fleet Fly-In, hosted by Naval Helicopter Association and HT-8, was mostly online this year with many speakers and presentations operating virtually. Students could social distance but still attend the sessions following COVID-19 mitigations. There were no familiarization flights this year, but several aircraft were onboard for display with crews, located on South Field.

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Aircraft rest on the South Field flightline during the Fleet Fly-In as attendees checkout the different rotary platforms. (Photo by Jamie Link, NAS Whiting Field Public Affairs)

2020 Chief selects stand outside of the command building; ABHC (Sel) Mauricio Onate, ABHC (Sel) Jeffrey Block, ACC (Sel) Robert Leverett, ACC (Sel) Randolph R. Mutter, and MAC (Sel) Byron Lopez.

The MH-53E Sea Dragon and the Osprey sit on the South Field flightline during the mostly virtual Fleet Fly-In. (Photo by Jamie Link, NAS Whiting Field Public Affairs)
Navarre Native Becomes Naval Aviator

by Julie Ziegenhorn, NASWF Public Affairs
Naval Air Station Whiting Field, Fla. -- Lt.j.g. Connor Black, who hails from Navarre, Fla., earned his Wings of Gold onboard Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field in a ceremony on Thursday, Nov. 5.

After graduating from Navarre High School in 2014, Black pursued a scholarship opportunity with both the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and Navy ROTC.

“Afther high school, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do, but I knew about ROTC programs and the scholarships they offered. So I applied for the Air Force and Navy scholarships. Eventually, the Navy offered me theirs, and I accepted,” he explained.

With the Navy scholarship, Black studied psychology at Southern University and A&M College, where he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in psychology.

His interest in pursuing naval aviation began during his senior year of college.

“I had spent some time with an aviation squadron, and was happy to move into that pipeline. I’ve enjoyed it thus far,” Black commented.

Mentors in his life helped him stick with his goals and provided encouragement to stay in school.

“I don’t come from a family of service (military). I had a teacher in high school who was a retired Navy helicopter pilot. He pointed me in the Navy’s direction when we talked about what I wanted to do. My best friend’s dad was also an Air Force Chief Master Sergeant, and he was the one who convinced me to stick it out when I had doubts about college,” Black said.

When asked what his experience in aviation training was like, Black commented that “it’s hard to beat your navigation solos in advanced training. You get the keys to one of the birds and are told to have fun with it, be safe, and learn from the experience.”

“You’re not graded, you get a friend (who is also in aviation training) to sit in the left seat, and you get to apply the stuff you’ve learned over the past few months as you fly around the Gulf Coast. It really was the first time I felt like a pilot,” he explained.

Growing up in Navarre, Black got used to the aviation around the area.

“But what was interesting was seeing the place where I grew up from the air. I can’t tell you the number of times I would look down and say, ‘hey, I remember going to that movie theater or restaurant.’ It also provided a sense of scale, because I’d always thought of Navarre and Pensacola as far apart… but out over the East Bay, it’s easy to see how close they really are,” he said.

Excited to begin a future chapter in naval aviation, Black’s next move is to NAS Jacksonville to fly the MH-60R helicopter with Helicopter Maritime Strike (HSM) East.
Congratulations to Training Air Wing Five Wingers
Whiting Field Awards and Recognition

Congratulations to Training Air Wing Five Wingers

HT-8 Winging Class Oct. 23, 2020

HT-18 Winging Class Oct. 23, 2020

HT-28 Winging Class Oct. 23, 2020
Congratulations to Training Air Wing Five Awardees

TW-5 Commodore's List with Recipient receives recognition at TRAWING-5 Headquarters
Sept. 15, 2020

TW-5 Commodore's List Recipient with Distinction receives recognition at TRAWING-5 Headquarters
Oct. 16, 2020

TW-5 Commodore's List Recipient with Distinction receives recognition at TRAWING-5 Headquarters
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Bellatty retires after 34 years of service

by VT-6 Public Affairs

Milton, Fla – Lt. Cmdr. William Bellatty, U.S. Coast Guard, will retire in January with more than 34 years of active service and with the distinction as the oldest active aviator in the Coast Guard.

A COVID-19-mitigated ceremony will be held in December with family and a small contingent of VT-6 Shooters paying their respect and celebrating a long career of service and dedication.

Bellatty grew up in Franklin, Maine, a small town on the coast of Maine.

He enlisted in the Coast Guard in the summer of 1978 after graduating from Sumner Memorial High School. While waiting for his Aviation Electronics "A" School, he spent his first year aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Sagebrush, a 180' Buoy Tender based out of San Juan, Puerto Rico. The Sagebrush was responsible for all aids to navigation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

After completion of “A” school as an Aviation Electronics Technician 3rd class, he was stationed at Coast Guard Air Stations Sacramento, Calif., Barbers Point, Hawaii, Sacramento, and Borinquen, Puerto Rico, amassing more than 3,000 hours of aircrew time as an avionicsman, radioman and navigator in the C-130H Hercules. While stationed at CGAS Borinquen in 1992, he applied for and was accepted to Officer Candidate School in Yorktown, Va.

He was one of three new graduates selected for flight training and earned his “Wings of Gold” in November 1993. Shortly thereafter he completed initial training in the HH-60J.

As an HH-60J pilot, Bellatty completed operational tours at Air Station Cape Cod, Mass., Air Station Sitka, Alaska, and Air Station Cape Cod for a second tour. These air stations have some of the Coast Guard’s most demanding flying conditions. Bellatty is responsible for saving more than 100 lives during these three tours with 55 of them coming from his last Cape Cod tour, 1999 to 2003. During that tour, he and his crew were selected to meet President Bush for their heroism during the rescue of five fisherman whose boat sank in 35’ seas.

Bellatty first retired after 27 years in the Coast Guard in July 2005 after completing a 3-year tour as the Command Center Supervisor in the Coast Guard’s First District where he and his watch center were responsible for managing/monitoring all Search and Rescue, Fisheries Enforcement, and Homeland Security from the Maine/Canada Border to New York City.

While retired the first time from the Coast Guard, he continued his career as a pilot, flying for both an oil and gas company off the coast of West Africa, and as an EMS pilot out of Santa Cruz, Calif.

Bellatty has since been voluntarily recalled back to active duty twice as a VT-6 instructor pilot. Now flying with more than 34 years of active duty service, Bellatty has set a unique and impressive record as the oldest actively flying pilot in the Coast Guard.

During his tenure at VT-6, Bellatty has mentored 38 on-wings through primary flight training and accrued more than 1,000 hours in the T-6B Texan. Bellatty will retire with more than 10,000 hours of time in the air, more than 7,000 of those hours as a pilot in eight different military and civilian aircraft. His awards include the Coast Guard Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Coast Guard Humanitarian Medal, and Coast Guard Achievement Medal.

Many have said, “To say that Bellatty will be missed at VT-6 and Naval Air Station Whiting Field is an enormous understatement.”