



# Air Terminal dedicated to Navy's first 'Blue Angel'

By Staff

The R. M. "Butch" Voris, U.S. Navy, Captain (Ret.) AMC Passenger Terminal was officially dedicated on Nov. 2, 2000, to the original founder of the U.S. Navy's Flight Exhibition Team. That team eventually became known the world over as "The Blue Angels." Voris and his wife, Thea, joined NAS Jacksonville Commanding Officer, Capt. Stephen A. Turcotte, Rear Adm. Jan Gaudio, Commander, Navy Region Southeast, members of the present Blue Angels demonstration team, several former Blue Angels commanding officers and other honored guests at the terminal for the



*U.S. Navy retired Capt. R. M. "Butch" Voris addresses guests at the dedication ceremony as Capt. Stephen Turcotte, NAS Jacksonville commanding officer looks on.*

dedication Friday evening. During the event, Turcotte unveiled a wall bearing a plaque cast with the image of Voris as well as a group of historic photographs depicting Voris and the exhibition squadron during its early years. Base historian Ron Williamson opened the ceremony and Cmdr. (Monsignor) Simon Peter G. Ignacio, delivered the benediction.



*Capt. "Butch" Voris (center) with four fellow Blue Angels from past years. With Voris are Lt. Col. R. Stoney Mayock II (USMC ret.), Capt. Mark Perault, (USN ret.) Capt. George Dom (USN), and Lt. Ray Sandelli (USN ret.).*

In dedicating the facility to Voris, Turcotte said, "I can't think of anyone better that you could dedicate a building to where people can walk through and remember a great hero... The Blue Angels are the most recognized symbol of the U.S. Navy in the world and as people walk through here they will be able to see the tradition that has been passed down for more than 54 years. Butch Voris is a leader to emulate."

In 1946, the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations directed the

establishment of a Navy flight exhibition team to demonstrate precision fighter maneuvers at Navy air shows and public events.

Voris was selected as the Officer-in-Charge and Flight Leader of this precision flying squadron.

A native of California, Voris graduated from Salinas College in 1939.

He entered the Navy in 1941 and by February 1942, he was commissioned an ensign and designated a naval aviator.

During his first deployment in World War II, Voris flew the Grumman F4F "Wildcat" from the aircraft carrier Enterprise. In his following cruise, he flew Grumman F6F "Hellcats" from Guadalcanal in support of the First Marines and from the Carriers Enterprise and Hornet. During his air battles in the Pacific, he earned "fighter ace" status recording eight fighter-to-fighter confirmed kills. Voris commanded Fighter Squadron (VF) 113, VF-131 and Attack Carrier Air Group 5.

Voris earned three Distinguished Flying Crosses, 11 Air Medals, three Presidential Unit Citations, and the Purple Heart. He participated in numerous fighter sweeps against enemy airfields and other enemy installations as the Navy advanced through the Pacific.

After World War II, Voris was assigned to the Advanced

Training Command at NAS Jacksonville. Here, in 1946, under SecNav and CNO direction, he established The Navy Flight Exhibition Team.

During his remarks at the dedication, Voris explained that the naming of the team took some time and wrangling with his superiors, with several names knocked around. One which he particularly disliked was "The Blue Lancers." Finally, a fellow aviator hit upon the idea of "The Blue Angels"

after noticing an advertisement in "New Yorker" magazine for a well-known nightclub in New York City. The name didn't sit well with his superior who had favored the Blue Lancers name. But as it had already hit the press and headlines referred to the team as The Blue Angels, the name took hold. When Voris put together that early team he selected his aircraft, pilots and maintenance personnel from the Navy's best officers and Sailors, just as they are today. The Grumman F6F "Hellcat" was selected because of its outstanding flight characteristics. Voris directed modifications to the Hellcat to reduce the aircraft weight and implemented a new paint scheme with traditional Navy colors - blue and gold. Voris recalled that after he retired, he was contacted by a former worker at NAS Jacksonville's O&R Department (now known as NADEP Jax).

The worker asked him how they ever managed to secure all the gold leaf that was used in



*First Blue Angel R. M. "Butch" Voris and his wife, Thea, are applauded by members of the current Blue Angels team and other guests.*

## Air Terminal realized by NAS Jax self help efforts

The AMC Air Terminal building was formerly two warehouses (buildings 278 and 279) assigned to Quick Trans, an air freight contractor. The tenant was disestablished in 1994, and the buildings sat vacant until the Air Field Manager Bill Meyers devised a plan to renovate the buildings and relocate the air terminal function, which had out-grown its 1940s era facilities in the air operations terminal building. A self-help project was initiated, and actions conducted by military personnel kept their part of the renovation under \$50,000. Additional funding was dedicated for electrical, heating, air conditioning, and sprinkler systems. The building formally opened for business on Dec. 19, 1997. More than 50,000 passengers pass through annually.

painting those first aircraft, commenting on the expense using real gold must have involved.

After telling this story, Voris smiled slyly and said, "talk about your \$500 toilet seats!" Clearly, The Blue Angels aircraft of today have a less costly paint scheme, although the blue and gold colors of the squadron's F/A-18 Hornets are still the pride of naval aviation.

Voris also flew the F8F "Bearcat" with the exhibition team. He later returned to command the team for a second time in 1951. During that tour, he reformed and lead the team flying the F9F "Panther" jet.

Voris retired from the Navy in 1963 and worked for the Grumman Corporation in Bethpage, N.Y. for the next 10 years. In 1973, he joined the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the Office of Industry Affairs.

In 1985, Voris retired from civilian employment to Monterey, Calif. with his wife of 53 years. In 1993, he was honored by the Air Force in a "Gathering of Eagles" ceremony as one of 20 aviators internationally who had made significant contributions to the world of aviation.

In his remarks, Voris thanked the commanding officer for the honor being bestowed upon him and gave some insight into the philosophy and character which he instilled into this legendary flying team, traits which not only apply to precision aviation but to life as a whole. He said, "You'll never have excellence without competition. Whatever you do in life you must balance reasonable risks vs. return..." In 1946, Capt. R. M. "Butch" Voris took a risk, as have scores of Blue Angels since, realizing a return of heroic proportions.