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VAQ-136 Walking Down a Path Filled with Big Changes

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Public Affairs*

INDIAN OCEAN (July , 2011) – Aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), embarked squadron VAQ-136 from Carrier Air Wing (CVW) FIVE are continuing daily operations across the western Pacific, but simultaneously, looking down a flight path filled with major changes that will impact the pilots, the aircrews and their families in the months ahead.

The biggest change will come in 2012 when the sun will finally set on “The Gauntlets.” They’ll return to the squadron’s birthplace, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in WA to begin training on their new aircraft, the EA-18G “Growler.” For a squadron that was one of their first to fly the EA-6B Prowler, this is a change that leaves many with mixed emotions.

“Even though the squadron will be transitioning to a new aircraft, I see a lot of exciting new challenges in the future for VAQ-136,” said Cmdr. Mike Tatsch, commanding officer of VAQ-136. “Flying these old girls and keeping them combat ready has been a real joy for me and I’m glad I was able to take part in the heritage of the EA-6Bs and their service to the seventh fleet area of readiness.”

The Gauntlets new aircraft will be able to provide all of the electronic attack mission capabilities that the EA-6B Prowler has offered for decades, coupled with the air-to-air capabilities of an F/A-18F strike fighter.

“For the Gauntlets, this will mean training both aircrew and maintainers on an entirely new platform,” said Lt. Grant Jarvis, public affairs officer for VAQ-136. “VAQ-136 is excited and enthusiastic about the future of electronic attack, but will always remember the squadron’s origins.”

The most immediate change VAQ-136 will experience is a change of command, Cmdr. Tatsch moving onto become the Assistant Chief of Staff for CNATRA (N7-Training) while the squadron's executive officer, Cmdr. Mike O'Leary will take command.

"I am honored to take the command of such a strong group of true professionals and the legacy they have built at VAQ-136," said Cmdr. O'Leary.

Back on April 6, 1973 when VAQ-136 first stood up, it was the fifth operational Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron to fly the EA-6B Prowler and the first to train using a tactical air platform rather than the traditional stand-off jamming platform.

This meant that instead of the squadron positioning miles away from the strike package to jam a large radius, they could instead fly into the area of readiness to ensure greater success and offer better protection.

"Our primary mission is to provide a protective umbrella for all other aircraft to go in and carry out their mission," said Cmdr. Mike O'Leary, executive officer of VAQ-136. "We are the eyes and ears of the strike group and train to protect our fellow aviators and all of the fixed wing aircraft."

By doing so, VAQ-136 performs crucial roles with George Washington strike group. These include hiding entire strike packages from surface or air threats, jamming enemy radars, providing sea surveillance and reconnaissance for the strike group and taking out vast arsenals of anti-aircraft and anti-surface enemy radars and missile systems.

VAQ-136 also takes part in simulating various enemy air threats when training with the strike fighter squadrons. This enhances a strike fighter squadron's ability to train for encounters with an increased number of enemy air threats.

Since cross decking from USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) to the George Washington strike group in 2008, VAQ-136 has participated in many exercises with the George Washington strike group, including Talisman Sabre and ANNUALEX 2009 as well as receiving numerous awards and honors.

In 2009, the squadron received the Admiral Arthur W. Radford Award, the Battle E, the Golden Wrench maintenance award and the Medical Blue M. In 2010, VAQ-136 repeated their success by being awarded another Medical Blue M and the Golden Anchor for retention honor role.

George Washington returned to patrolling the waters of the Western Pacific ocean on June 12, 2011, departing her forward operating base of Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka. Onboard are more than 5,500 Sailors from George Washington and Carrier Air Wing Five.

George Washington's mission is to ensure security and stability in the Western Pacific and to be in position to work with our allies and regional partners to respond to any crisis across the operational spectrum as directed.

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