

Triumph in Kosovo: Naval Aviation Keys Allied Success

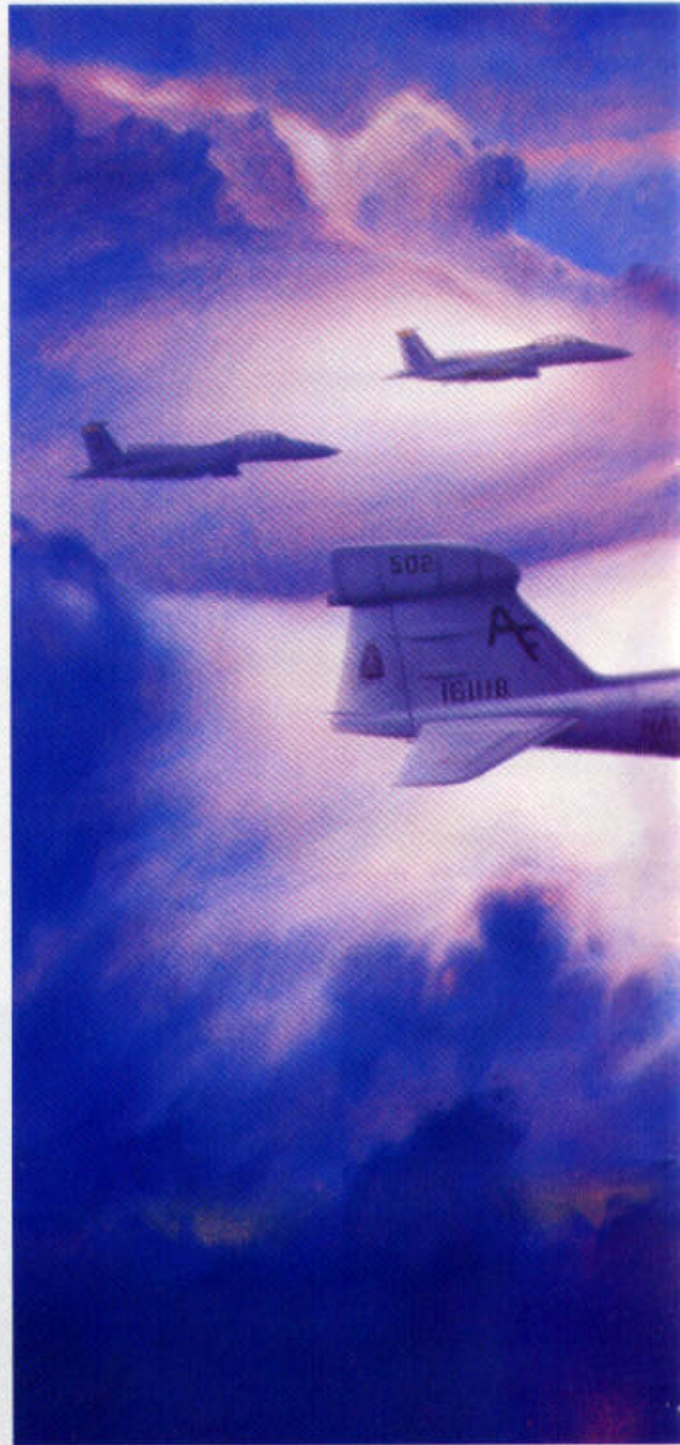
By RAdm. John Nathman
Director, Air Warfare



Naval Aviation's pivotal role in the success of Operation Allied Force—the international effort to halt the “cleansing” of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, Serbia, and restore peace to the former Yugoslavia—has been largely unsung. To provide an overview of Navy and Marine Corps contributions to the operation, Admiral Nathman's Flightline department has been expanded to a feature, complemented by input from Naval Aviation units from around the fleet who were there.

In many respects, Operation Allied Force, the recent air campaign over Yugoslavia and the province of Kosovo, was tailor-made for the successful application of land-based air power. Geopolitical boundaries, in particular, favored the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The battlespace was virtually surrounded by allied countries, providing convenient access to numerous, well-equipped bases. Additionally, 13 of our NATO allies contributed military forces, including over 300 aircraft that flew some 15,000 sorties during the 78-day air campaign. Naval Aviation contributed 226 aircraft, or roughly two-thirds of the assets provided by our allies combined.

Though the preponderance of force structure was not supplied by the Navy-Marine Corps team, as the old saying goes, “It's not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog that counts.” From the media coverage of the conflict it was difficult to discern just how large a contribution naval sea-



based and expeditionary forces played in Allied Force. Not only were Naval Aviation's direct contributions often out of proportion to the numbers, but the Navy and Marine Corps brought critical capabilities to the fight which proved decisive to the air campaign's spectacular success. I am proud to report that the men and women of Naval Aviation brilliantly met the challenges of Kosovo.

Naval Air's involvement in Kosovo included electronic attack, strike warfare, humanitarian operations and the deployment of peacekeeping forces. Naval air-



craft operating from the *Nassau* (LHA 4) and *Kearsarge* (LHD 3) amphibious ready groups, the *Inchon* (MCS 12) mine countermeasures squadron, and the

Theodore Roosevelt carrier battle group—in addition to land-based expeditionary EA-6B *Prowlers*, P-3C *Orions*, EP-3E *Aries IIs* and F/A-18D *Hornets*—provided joint task force commanders with coherent air power that was extremely effective across the spec-

This painting by NANA News Art Director Morgan Wilbur depicts a VAQ-209 EA-6B *Prowler* engaging Serbian air defenses with an AGM-88 HARM while protecting two F-15E *Strike Eagles* on a typical combat mission during Operation Allied Force.

trum of operations. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of our Naval Aviation successes and contributions.

Approximately 30 percent of the naval aircraft involved in the conflict came from Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8, flying off the deck of *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71). *TR* left Norfolk, Va., on 26 March for a planned deployment to the Arabian Gulf; 10 days later, her embarked squadrons were



PH11 Dennis D. Taylor

putting steel on target in Yugoslavia. Between 6 April and 9 June, CVW-8 aircraft flew 4,270 total sorties and 3,055 combat sorties—with zero losses—executing the most precise air campaign in history, resulting in the lowest levels of collateral damage ever. These sorties involved essential combat support missions, such as close air support, battlefield airborne interdiction, electronic support and airborne battlefield command and control, as well as strike missions. The *Hornets*, *Prowlers* and F-14 *Tomcats* of CVW-8 destroyed or damaged a total of 447 tactical targets and 88 fixed targets.

Although the results were impressive, the apportionment of missions to CVW-8 within the air campaign fell far short of the battle group's actual capacity to conduct sustained combat operations. Despite this, the squadrons of CVW-8 provided a deadly combination of precision and lethality, and proved an essential part of Allied Force strike operations. Their success validated the naval strike warfare concept of operations, developed and continually

As an F-14 passes arresting gear personnel aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71), the *Tomcat's* tail hook is readied to "grab the wire." Opposite, in preparation for his flight, a pilot gets one last breath of fresh air before he climbs into the cockpit of an EA-6B *Prowler* on board *TR* operating in the Adriatic Sea in support of NATO Operation Allied Force.

refined through the air wing training process at the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center. One particular alpha strike, against the Podgorica airfield, was planned and executed with-

in eight hours—a dramatic testament to the training, responsiveness, professionalism and skill of our warriors.

Naval Air's contribution to the NATO reconnaissance effort represents a vivid example of our effectiveness. Providing one-fifth of the land-based reconnaissance platforms, Naval Aviation executed well over one-third of the reconnaissance missions during the operation. Utilization rates for naval reconnaissance aircraft were, in some cases, as much as twice that of the next busiest nonnaval assets—a clear indication not only of the proficiency of our operators and quality of their product, but also the caliber of the maintenance effort that kept our aircraft "up" and mission capable. Additionally, 10 P-3C *Orions*, five of which were equipped with the Antisurface Warfare Improvement Program upgrade, maintained a 24-hour armed surface combat air patrol in

the Adriatic. A total of 391 combat support/reconnaissance missions were flown, encompassing 3,840 flight hours. These effectively eliminated any threat from the Yugoslavian navy and allowed allied tactical aircraft to concentrate exclusively on interdiction of fixed targets and Kosovo engagement zone operations.

There is perhaps no greater success story in this operation than that of the EA-6B. Five *Prowlers* from CVW-8, along with 14 Navy and eight Marine EA-6Bs flying out of Aviano, Italy, provided essential electronic warfare support for Allied Force air strike missions. *Prowlers* also fired nearly half of all the high-speed anti-radiation missiles (HARM) employed during the Kosovo conflict. These aircraft flew more than 1,600 sorties and 6,700 flight hours. As the only standoff jammer available to allied air forces, the *Prowler* was vital to the success of the air campaign, including missions flown by the B-2, B-1, F-117 and other NATO tactical aircraft.

Concern for limiting collateral damage persisted throughout the campaign and combined with other factors such as integrated air defenses, terrain, weather and enemy tactics to make strike planning and targeting very challenging. Bringing an all-precision capability to the fight, Naval Aviation again played a leading role by delivering a disproportionately higher percentage of precise ordnance. Not only did naval aircraft routinely employ precision weapons, such as laser-guided bombs, but Marine F/A-18Ds and Navy F-14s performed superbly as airborne forward air controllers, facilitating precise engagement of targets by other aircraft.

Additionally, a new generation of weapons was combat proven in Kosovo. As demonstrated in Iraq, the Joint Standoff Weapon allowed naval aircraft to strike from outside of the enemy's point defenses, combining inertial guidance and global positioning satellite accuracy to yield impressive results. This new weapon achieved a 100-percent success rate in Kosovo, with every one launched hitting the planned aim point well within designed accuracy.

Another new weapon, the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), saw its first operational employment during Allied Force. Nearly 700 JDAMs with approximately 1.4 million pounds of high explosive, employed first by the USAF B-2 bomber, were dropped with stunning accuracy during the campaign. Since the first Navy JDAM production rounds were not planned to be delivered until August and the initial operational capability not until September, its use by Naval Aviation was not originally envisioned. Joint Chiefs of Staff direction to rapidly accelerate the production schedule changed all that. The first deployable units flying appropriately configured *Hornets* were Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadrons (VMFA(AW)) 332 and 225. Both squadrons received intensive maintenance and aircrew training from the JDAM Program Office, Naval Aviation Maintenance Training Detachment, Test Squadron Pacific and Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 9 personnel. With JDAM operational evaluation ongoing, VX-9 conducted an abbreviated operational test of the actual weapon/fuse

configuration available for deployment. Sixteen JDAMs with 2,000-pound general-purpose warheads were dropped in two weeks to support the decision for an early operational capability. VMFA(AW)-332 was ordered to deploy in late May. Two weeks later, with the arrival of 46 JDAM tail kits and Chief of Naval Operations early operational capability authorization, Naval Aviation became JDAM capable, a sterling example of Navy-Marine Corps teamwork.

Navy Tomahawk land attack missiles also played a critical role in the air campaign. Used selectively throughout, they were sent to destroy over 50 percent of key headquarters and electrical power station targets. Launched from the sea to shape the battle inland, Navy Tomahawks achieved a 90-percent success rate against these vital targets in all-weather conditions.

The Marine Corps provided an outsized contribution to the air campaign as well. In addition to the expeditionary *Prowlers*, VMFA(AW)-332 and -533 F/A-18Ds deployed to Taszar,



PHAA Travis Ploos

Hungary. Complemented by 12 AV-8B *Harrier IIs* from *Nassau* and *Kearsarge*, together they flew nearly 500 sorties, destroying significant high-value targets. Marine Corps aircrews, along with supporting ground forces, maintained a continuous Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel alert throughout the conflict, while the 24th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable) provided credible, ready U.S. forces for contingency/forced entry ground operations.

MH-53 *Sea Dragons* and H-46 *Sea Knights* flying off *Inchon* were the workhorses of Operation Shining Hope, the humanitarian relief effort delivering supplies to remote refugee camps, averting starvation for thousands of refugees in northern Albania. Having trained for a deployment focused on a series of countermine exercises, the ships and embarked aircraft of *Inchon's* mine countermeasures squadron showed remarkable adaptability and flexibility when they were diverted in response to the emerging humanitarian crisis.

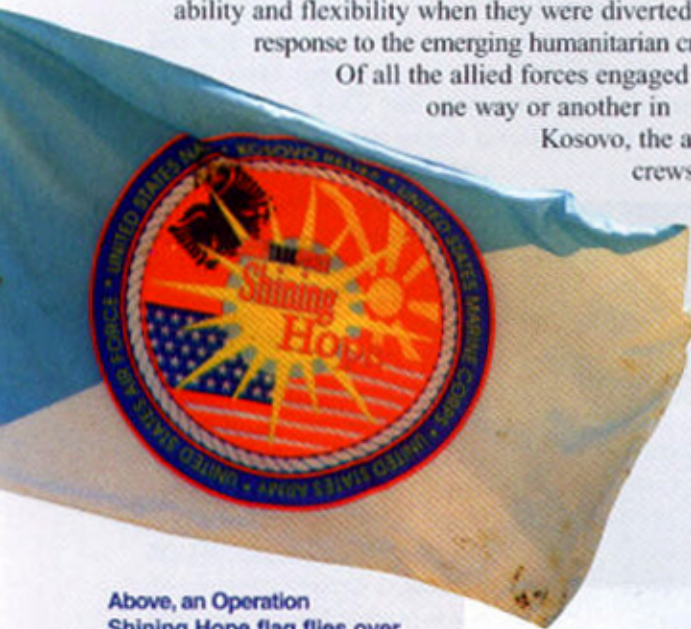
Of all the allied forces engaged in one way or another in Kosovo, the aircrews and

ship's company supporting Shining Hope had perhaps the most direct and immediate impact on easing the human suffering and misery arising from the conflict.

This glimpse of Naval Aviation in Kosovo conveys a sense of our effectiveness across the spectrum of conflict, as well as the depth of capabilities naval expeditionary forces bring to bear, even under circumstances where access to land bases is not constrained. The Navy and Marine Corps team's contribution is particularly remarkable when considered in the context of naval expeditionary operations worldwide. Throughout Operation Allied Force, forward-deployed units of Naval Aviation continued to support operations in the Pacific, Arabian Gulf and elsewhere around the world.

We can all take pride in the superb performance of Naval Aviation during the conflict in Kosovo. The goal of putting an end to human suffering and atrocities while restoring stability in the region was attained, in no small measure, as a result of the professionalism, skill and dedication of the Sailors and Marines who flew and supported every mission.

To all who participated in the Allied Force campaign, WELL DONE!



Above, an Operation Shining Hope flag flies over Camp Hope, the first U.S. camp built in Albania to provide relief to Kosovar refugees, right. The humanitarian relief effort delivered food and life-saving supplies to thousands of refugees. HM2 Tobias Greynolds of the 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Company, Camp Lejeune, N.C., aboard *Kearsarge* (LHD 3), summed up the operation's importance: "We treated a four-year-old girl with third degree burns, and she later came up and gave me a kiss on the forehead. It was touching because she was so thankful for us being there. That one moment made the entire mission worth it for me."



Photos by PH2 Brian McFadden



PHO William L. Vandermate



PHAN Jason Scarborough

The TR and Carrier Air Wing Eight

Under the leadership of RAdm. Bill Copeland, Commander Task Force 60 and battle group commander during Operation Allied Force, *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) launched more than 3,000 sorties, including about 1,700 strike missions, tracked by Combat Direction Center personnel such as OSCS Dominick Albano and OSSN Travis Kiefer, above inset.

Above, three F-14 *Tomcats* return from a mission to the carrier's busy flight deck, right. RAdm. Copeland described the allied effort as "truly phenomenal." The American aviators and their NATO counterparts worked together in the air without having been briefed together on the ground. The admiral said that although the carrier maintained a high operational tempo, few Sailors complained and morale remained high. The crew felt good about what they had helped accomplish. He added, "Someone was looking out for us the nine weeks that we fought this war. Not one [Navy] airplane was hit by any shrapnel. All the pilots came back safe."

Naval combat aircraft, primarily from CVW-8 aboard *TR*, flew 23 percent of all sorties and were responsible for approximately 33 percent of the confirmed target kills. Commander Sixth Fleet VAdm. Daniel J. Murphy stated, "It was the air wing that was central to the progress in our ability to identify locations and defeat the Serbian forces."



LT Bradley K. Silva

Prowlers Afloat and Ashore

Reserve Electronic Attack Squadron 209 deployed with a 96-hour notice for Europe. VAQ-209 skipper Cdr. Clay Fearnow said, "Flying an aircraft in high demand and short supply, we knew our squadron EA-6Bs and personnel were needed. [As Electronic Attack Wing, Aviano], VAQs 209, 138 and 140 developed a maintenance effort to maintain 14 Prowlers to meet an around-the-clock flight schedule." Together, they achieved a 100-percent mission completion rate flying over 640 sorties throughout the conflict. One-third of the Navy's EA-6B inventory was dedicated to Operation Allied Force. Below, a flight deck crew member aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) directs an EA-6B Prowler after its arrested landing during the operation. Right, a Prowler pilot's-eye view of Canadian F/A-18 Hornets (far right) and a VAQ-209 Prowler taxiing at Aviano Air Base, Italy.



LCdr. Andy Mueller



PH2 Jonathan Byrd

Precision Strike

The Navy fired 47 percent of all U.S. forces HARMs. CVW-8 F-14s served as forward air controllers and were airborne for 50 percent of all close-air support missions. Aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71): right, Fighter Squadron 14 aviation ordnancemen mount a Low Altitude Navigation and Targeting Infrared for Night pod on a Tomcat, while AO2 Joleen Trahan, below, readies a precision-guided munition.

PH2 Jonathan Byrd



PH1 Dennis Taylor

Marines Strike First

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 *Harrier IIs* from the *Nassau* (LHA 4) amphibious ready group (ARG) conducted the first strikes of Operation Allied Force. Right, the air boss watches as an AV-8B lands. As part of the NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo, the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) from the *Kearsarge* (LHD 3) ARG established a forward operating base in Macedonia only 42 hours after offload. Together with Army elements, the 26th MEU comprised the first Americans to arrive in the former Republic of Yugoslavia.



PH1 Richard Frosner

Inchon Action

The countermeasures support ship *Inchon* (MCS 12), right, gets underway for deployment. Inset, Airman Susan Fannie hands out homemade cookies to Albanian children near Camp Hope. Below, an MH-53E *Sea Dragon* from HM-15 unloads passengers to look at a prospective refugee camp. *Inchon's* mine countermeasures squadron worked with the *Nassau* and *Kearsarge* ARGs in providing joint task force commanders with effective air power during Operation Allied Force. The operation's success illustrates the effectiveness of the ARG/MEU team.



PH1 Sean P. Jordan



Photos by PH2 Brian McFadden



Orions Go AIP

The maritime patrol force for Operation Noble Anvil, the U.S. component of Operation Allied Force, was provided by aircraft from Task Force 67, deployed to NAS Sigonella, Sicily—10 P-3C

Orions and 14 crews from Patrol Squadrons 1, 4, 5 and 10 from Naval Air Stations Whidbey Island, Wash.; Barbers Point, Hawaii; Jacksonville, Fla.; and Brunswick, Maine, respectively.

Five of these *Orions* were equipped with the Antisurface Warfare Improvement Program (AIP) upgrade, which saw



VP-10 P-3C photo courtesy of Mediterranean News Service

its combat debut in the skies over Kosovo. The system includes synthetic aperture radar, which provides all-weather, day or night surveillance capability; Standoff Land Attack Missile (SLAM) capability; and a suite of sensor, communications and self-defense equipment.

The AIP-equipped *Orions*' ability to downlink surveillance images provided an unprecedented real-time and near-real-time view of the tactical situation. The addition of the SLAM to the strike package gave planners the flexibility of hitting mobile targets on short notice, with the AIP *Orions* firing a total of 14 SLAMs at Serb targets.

"I cannot overstate the AIP's operational impact," said Rear Admiral Steve Tomaszewski, Commander Task Force 67. "The mixture of mission-oriented weapon loadouts, all-weather surveillance and strike capabilities gave the battle group a degree of flexibility never before attained."

Left, VP-10's Lt. Brenden Barber, Ltjg. Henry Rendon and Lts. John Fox and David Peterson discuss their P-3C *Orion's* status while on deployment to NAS Sigonella.



PH2 Norman T. Kemper

The Capital Express

Marines board a C-130 *Hercules* of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VR) 53, the *Capital Express*, at NAF Washington, D.C., on their way to assume guard duty at the U.S. Embassy in Skopje, Macedonia. Whether transporting a squadron to a weapons training detachment, moving ship's personnel to and from home port or supporting international operations such as Allied Force, VRs provide expert logistics support. The Naval Reserve squadrons are made up of active duty Training and Administration of Reserves personnel and part-time Selected Reservists.



PHC Paul A. Kerr

Stalwarts of Support at Souda Bay

The primary mission of U.S. Naval Support Activity Souda Bay, Greece—to support and enhance the readiness of U.S. and allied forces operating in or transiting through the European theater—was put to the test in Operation Allied Force. Most notably, the facility provided over 2.6 million gallons of JP-5 to Air Force KC-135 tankers that refueled the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force planes flying in the Kosovo region; loaded and airlifted cargo and weapons; and served as a base of operations for EP-3E *Aries IIs* of Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron 2 Det Souda Bay, right.



Paul Farley

Land the Marines

On 9 June, an agreement signed in Macedonia set the stage for the departure of Serbian army, special police and paramilitary forces from Kosovo. The next day, NATO suspended Operation Allied Force. Below, Marines from the 26th MEU board a MH-53E *Sea Dragon* on *Kearsarge* (LHD 3) headed to Skopje, Macedonia. While on board, Secretary of Defense William Cohen heralded Naval Aviation's success: "Your dedication, talent and ability to do this mission is what makes the U.S. the only superpower in the world." Right, Kosovo villagers from Koretin greet the 26th MEU's Delta Company, Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion prior to a victory parade.



Lance Cpl. Richard O'Connor



Sgt. Craig J. Shell

... Success!

When the history of the successful air campaign in Kosovo is written, Naval Air will take its rightful place as an effective instrument for the implementation of national policy, whether in combat or peacekeeping missions," stated Capt. Terry McGinnis, who led a Combat Documentation Team recording U.S. Navy contributions to Operation Allied Force.

This feature highlights some of the units that participated in Operation Allied Force. Space prohibits covering all the dedicated personnel who helped make it a success. Special thanks for assistance from: Capt. Chris Jensen and Cdr. Jeremy Gillespie, Office of CNO's Director, Air Warfare; Capt. Terry McGinnis, Naval Combat Documentation Unit, Det 206, Naval Historical Center; Cdr. Clay Fearnow, CO, VAQ-209, NAF Washington, D.C.; Paul Farley, NSA Souda Bay, Greece; Lt. Ron Steiner, Navy Mediterranean News Service; and JO1 Bob Conn, *Kearsarge* (LHD 3).