

Changes of Command

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Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 23 (VX-23) “Salty Dogs”

Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA-131) “Wildcats”

Commander, Carrier Strike Group FIVE (CSG-5)/Task Force 70 (TF-70)

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Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 23 (VX-23) “Salty Dogs”

Colonel Jay M. Zarra, USMC took command of the Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 23 (VX-23) “Salty Dogs” from Captain Daniel E. Kitts during a Change of Command ceremony at Naval Air Station Patuxent River on January 25, 2024. Captain Elizabeth Somerville, Commander, Naval Test Wing Atlantic, presided over the ceremony. Col Zarra became VX-23 Chief Test Pilot in June 2022, and has led more than 400 U.S. and United Kingdom military, government and industry personnel to complete over 400 ground test events and 500 unique test flights spanning over 1000 mishap-free flight hours. “As a Marine and test pilot, I’m honored at this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—I look forward to keeping that momentum,” said Col Zarra in his remarks. “I am leaving the command in the very capable hands of my USNA classmate and good friend Col Jay Zarra. I know that he will carry this organization forward exceptionally well and I am so excited for this opportunity for him.” said Captain Kitts. VX-23 is a component of Naval Test Wing Atlantic under Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division and provides Research, Development, Test and Evaluation support for fixed wing tactical aircraft to advance the capability and operational readiness of Naval Aviation.



Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA-131) “Wildcats”

Commander Sean “Ross” Reed assumed Command of Strike Fighter Squadron 131 (VFA-131) “Wildcats” from Commander Tyler “McGruber” McQuiggan on April 12, 2024 during an airborne Change of Command aboard USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69) during the Squadron’s unprecedented 2023-2024 combat deployment with the IKECSG in the South Red Sea and 5th Fleet Area of Operations. CDR McQuiggan has accumulated more than 2,500 flight hours and 600 carrier landings. His decorations include the Strike/Flight Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (four awards), Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (three awards), and various campaign, unit, and service awards. Commander McQuiggan continues service within the IKE CSG as the IKE Air Boss. Commander Andrew “Sugar” Stoner joins the “Wildcats” as incoming Executive Officer (XO).



Commander, Carrier Strike Group FIVE (CSG-5)/Task Force 70 (TF-70)

Rear Admiral Pat Hannifin turned command of Carrier Strike Group FIVE (CSG-5) and Task Force 70 (TF-70) over to Rear Admiral Greg Newkirk during a ceremony at U.S. Fleet Activities Yokosuka on April 12, 2024. Guest speaker at the event was Admiral John C. Aquilino, Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, with Vice Admiral Fred Kacher, Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet serving as Presiding Officer. “I’m incredibly proud of this team and their accomplishments over the past year,” said Rear Admiral Hannifin, completing his third Forward-Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) tour. “Command at any level is one of life’s most distinct honors and most sacred privileges,” said Rear Admiral Newkirk. Task Force 70 controls the preponderance of forward-deployed air and surface maneuver and striking forces in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations, overseeing Destroyer Squadron 15 (DESRON 15), Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 51 (HSM-51) and Electronic Attack Squadron 138 (VAQ-138), as well as the ships and aircraft operating under Carrier Strike Group FIVE (CSG-5), including the USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76), USS Robert Smalls (CG-62) and Carrier Air Wing 5 (CVW-5).



Commander, Carrier Strike Group TWELVE (CSG-12)

Rear Admiral Thomas P. Moninger relieved Rear Admiral Erik J. Eslich and assumed duties as Commander, Carrier Strike Group TWELVE (CSG-12) at the Pennsylvania House on Naval Station Norfolk, May 3, 2024. Rear Admiral Eslich led the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group (GRFCSG) through its inaugural deployment, directing approximately 7,500 Sailors across 17 Commands through numerous NATO exercises including *Operation Neptune Strike*, and *Exercise Sage Wolverine*, and in the response to the Hamas attack on Israel. “It has been an honor and a privilege to lead the Sailors of Carrier Strike Group TWELVE as we engaged our Allies and Partners showing the U.S. commitment to the region, advancing interoperability goals, and demonstrating the capabilities of the FORD class carrier,” said Rear Admiral Eslich. Vice Admiral John Gumbleton, Commander, Task Force 80 and Deputy Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces, served as the presiding officer and guest speaker. “Our nation counts on us when called upon to preserve the peace, deter aggression, and defeat our enemies,” said VADM Gumbleton. Rear Admiral Moninger, takes command of CSG-12 following a career of decorated leadership assignments, including service as the Commanding Officer of USS Arleigh Burke (DDG-51), Commander of Destroyer Squadron 22 (DESRON 22,) and Director of Plans and Policy on the Navy Staff. “I am thrilled to work alongside the Sailors of Carrier Strike Group 12,” said Rear Admiral Moninger. “I am joining an amazing team, and look forward to the opportunities and challenges to come.” CSG 12 is the immediate superior in command of USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78), Destroyer Squadron 2 (DESRON 2,) Carrier Air Wing 8 (CVW-8), USS Normandy (CG-60), USS Mahan (DDG-72), USS McFaul (DDG-74), and USS Oscar Austin (DDG-79).



Commander, Carrier Strike Group ELEVEN (CSG-11)

Rear Admiral Maximilian Clark relieved Rear Admiral Jennifer S. Couture as Commander, Carrier Strike Group 11 (CSG-11), during a ceremony held at Naval Station Everett, May 10, 2024. Rear Admiral Couture assumed command of CSG-11 in June 2023 and led the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group through its maintenance and work up phases preparing for its upcoming deployment. While under Rear Admiral Couture's command, CSG-11 operated in U.S. 7th Fleet with several other nations and participated in a variety of exercises and operations. Rear Admiral Couture addressed the crew of the Strike Group's accomplishments while under her command during the Change of Command ceremony. "Warrior Team Eleven, I am proud to have been the leader of your team while you accomplished great things," said Rear Admiral Couture. "When I joined the Strike Group at the end of a highly successful deployment to the 7th Fleet Area of Responsibility, in the Philippine Sea, the South China Sea, you were focused on warfighting, operating more effectively and efficiently than the day before thinking, preparing, and rehearsing for the future in the Pacific. Your accomplishments I witnessed over the last year are nothing short of remarkable." Rear Admiral Clark, the incoming CSG-11 Commander, has served in a variety of afloat and ashore billets as Naval Aviator, flying multiple variants of the H-60 helicopter. "I am deeply honored to take command of this Strike Group, and look forward to working with all the dedicated Sailors that man, maintain and operate this indispensable instrument of national power as we prepare for our next deployment," he said in his remarks.



Commander, Carrier Strike Group ONE (CSG-1)

Rear Admiral Michael Wosje relieved Rear Admiral Carlos Sardiello as Commander, Carrier Strike Group ONE (CSG-1) during a Change of Command ceremony aboard Naval Air Station North Island, June 6, 2024. “The Carrier Strike Group is an essential element of our nation's credible combat capability to guarantee peace around the world and our American way of life. Just two years ago marked 100 years of the U.S. Aircraft Carrier,” said Rear Admiral Sardiello, “Our young men and women who serve in CSG-1 and the Navy leave me awestruck because of their unmatched professionalism and dedication to service.” During the ceremony, Rear Admiral Wosje emphasized his enthusiasm in taking Command of CSG-1, “My family and I are delighted to join the Carrier Strike Group ONE team and look forward to all we will accomplish together,” CSG-1 was established in 1930 and serves as one of five U.S. Navy Carrier Strike Groups currently assigned to the U.S. Pacific Fleet. CSG-1 sustains lethal combat forces capable of operating in any maritime area of operations while maintaining naval superiority and readiness. CSG-1 is currently embarked aboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70).



Commander, Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC)

Capt. Daniel W. Brown relieved Capt. Robert “Barr” Kimmach III as the Commanding Officer of Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) during a Change of Command ceremony held at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, June 7, 2024. The Change of Command ceremony is a time-honored Naval tradition which draws its origins from ancient customs and laws of the sea begun by early seafaring men and women.



Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 3 (HSC-3) “Merlins”

The “Merlins” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 3 (HSC-3) welcomed a new Commanding Officer during an official Change of Command ceremony held aboard Naval Air Station North Island, August 8, 2024. During the ceremony, presided over by Captain Will “Easy” Eastham, Commodore, Helicopter Sea Combat Wing, Pacific, Commander Ian “Zoo” Adams relieved Captain Thomas “Smokey” Butts as the 47th Commanding Officer of HSC-3. CAPT Butts led the “Merlins” from August 2023 to August 2024. During his tenure as HSC-3’s 46th Commanding Officer, CAPT Butts managed a complex command encompassing multiple units, operating the MH-60S *Seahawk* helicopter and MQ-8C *Fire Scout* unmanned helicopter as the Pacific Fleet Replacement Squadron, Reserve Fleet Support Detachment, and Chief of Naval Operations Model Manager. Under his leadership, CAPT Butts directed the efforts of over 1,000 Squadron personnel in the maintenance and operation of nearly 40 permanently assigned aircraft, and surpassed 17,722 cumulative Class A mishap-free flight hours. “It has been an incredible honor to lead the Merlin Team here at HSC-3,” said CAPT Butts. “I look forward to seeing the “Merlins” continue their rich tradition of being the HSC standard bearers and Naval Aviation Enterprise community leaders.” CDR Adams joins the “Merlins” from his position on the Office of Naval Operations (OPNAV) Staff, where he served as a Director of Aviation (N98) Requirements Officer for the MQ-8C *Fire Scout* and Future Vertical Lift Maritime Strike programs. “As we stand at the forefront of defending our great nation, I am committed to upholding the highest standards of training and readiness,” said CDR Adams in his remarks. “Together, we will ensure that our pilots and aircrew are prepared to face any challenge with skill, courage, and unwavering resolve.”



