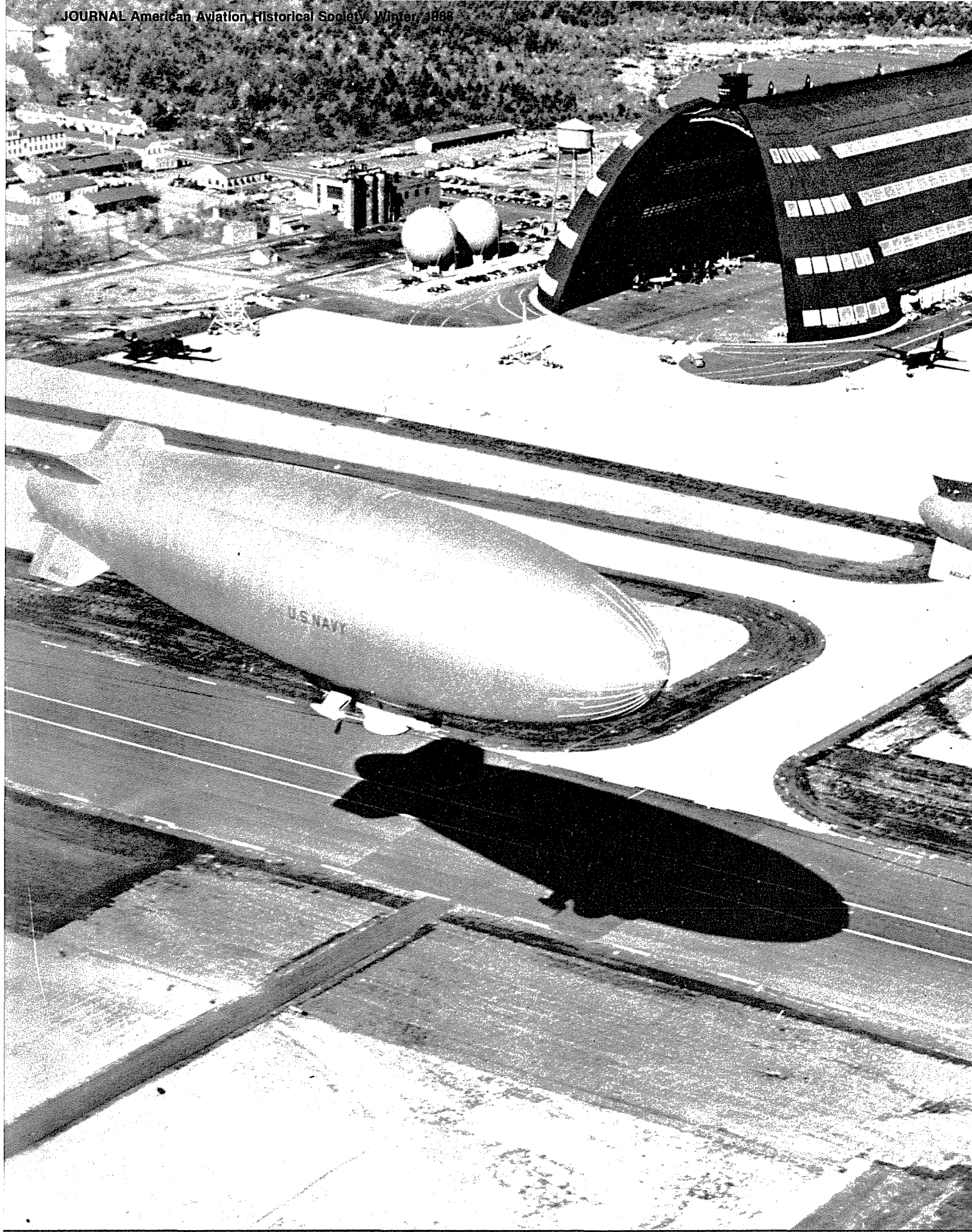
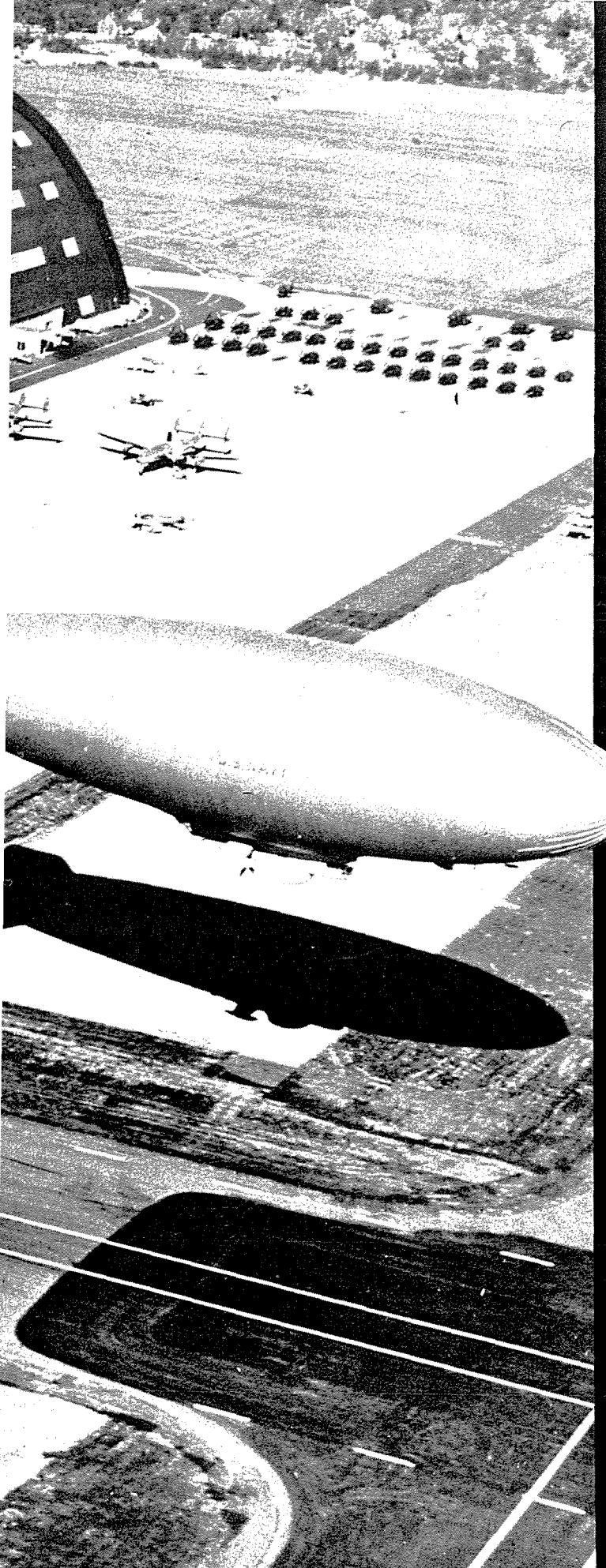






SOWEY

NAVAL AIR STATION SOUTH WEYMOUTH

by Tom Cuddy II and Ronald W. Harrison

On March 1, 1942, Naval Air Facility "Sowey," South Weymouth, was commissioned an anti-submarine blimp station that would play a significant role in convoy and coastal patrol duties throughout World War II. The site was selected during the spring of 1941 after an extensive survey of New England during 1940 by Capt. Charles E. Rosendahl, Chief of the Navy's Lighter-Than-Air program. The 335-acre tract of land, located 20 miles south of Boston, bordering the communities of Weymouth, Rockland and Abington, was purchased for \$25,000.

Early in 1942 a huge blimp dock was constructed which covered a full eight acres; it had a length of 956 feet, an interior width of 259 feet and an interior height of 191 feet, which made it the second largest blimp dock in the world. On each side of the hangar were 35-foot-wide lean-tos which housed the administrative and maintenance offices and workshops. Two huge doors at either end weighing 250 tons each were mounted on railroad track and were powered by electric motors. The steam-heated structure could house six ZPG-type blimps.

Squadron ZP-11 with eight blimps flew anti-submarine patrols from South Weymouth throughout World War II. The airship patrol effort along the East and West Coasts of the United States was a complete success with a record of dependability reaching 87 percent, which was a new record high for military aircraft.

During hostilities along the East Coast of North and South America, including the Caribbean, 532 vessels were sunk, but not a single vessel was sunk by submarine while being escorted by airship. Between May 29 and June 1, 1944, six blimps set out from South Weymouth to establish the first "Blimp Barrier" Squadron at Port Lyautey, French Morocco, for patrol duties at Gibraltar. After Airship Squadron 14 commenced patrol duties at Gibraltar in June 1944, no enemy submarines passed through the Straits either by day or night.

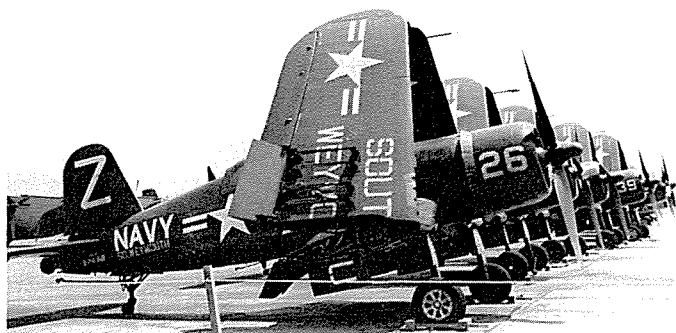
At the end of the war, NAF South Weymouth was placed in an inactive status. This inactivity did not last very long for during 1950 plans were formulated which called for the rebuilding of the facility to handle the training of Navy and Marine reserve units which were fast outgrowing their base at Squantum, Mass. Naval Air Reserve Squantum was commissioned in 1923 making it the first Naval Air Reserve Base. During 1925 the first two units, VS-4 and VF-11 were moved to Squantum from the Boston Naval Yard and were redesignated VH-1RD1 and VN-2RD1. During WWII it became a

Blimps over South Weymouth. (Public Relations, NAS South Weymouth)



250-ton doors dwarf 1960 air show crowd.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Goodyear FG-1D Corsair, 92492, 1955. Aircraft involved in move from Squantum.
(Photo by Tom Cuddy II)



Grumman AF-2S, 124796, 1955.

(Photo by Tom Cuddy II)

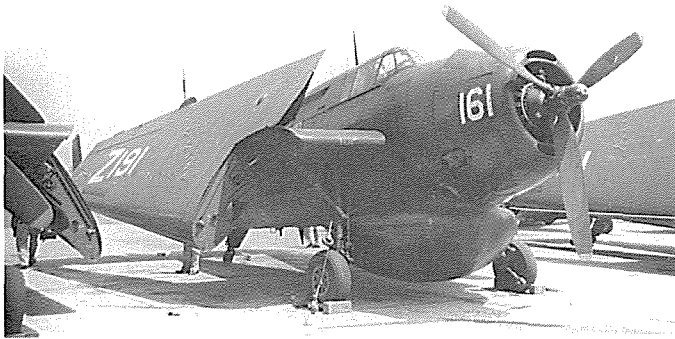
training base with pilots from all over the world training on their Yellow Peril Bi-Planes. By 1942, 2,300 pilots had received primary training there. Squantum's aviation history does, however, predate the Naval Reserve Base for in 1910 the Yale and Harvard flying clubs had held aviation meets which were sponsored by the *Boston Globe* newspaper. Aviators from all over the world were attracted to Squantum; such names as Graham-White (winner of the 1910 event), A.V. Roe, Charles Willard, and many more participated.

In spite of Squantum's significance to Naval aviation history its location, just outside of South Boston, dictated a move. The introduction of the jet fighter was probably the determining factor in the closing of NARB Squantum.

On December 4, 1953, U.S. Naval Air Station South Weymouth was commissioned. Captain Harry Sartoris, USNR, the last commanding officer of Squantum, became the first commanding officer of NAS South Weymouth; he also flew the last aircraft from Squantum to its new base.

During 1966 the blimp dock at "Sowey" was demolished and a smaller, more efficient aircraft hangar was erected on the same site. (Blimps had operated from South Weymouth as late as 1960.)

During the Vietnam War, starting in 1966, "Sowey's" three tactical support squadrons VR-911, 912 and 913 airlifted war cargo to the West Coast and Hawaii for shipment to Vietnam.



Grumman TBM of 1955, established South Weymouth in the anti-submarine role.
(Photo by Tom Cuddy II)



Convair P4Y-2 *Privateer*, 59867, 1957.

(Photo by Tom Cuddy II)



Grumman S2F-1 *Tracker*, 133106, 1956.

(Photo by Tom Cuddy II)



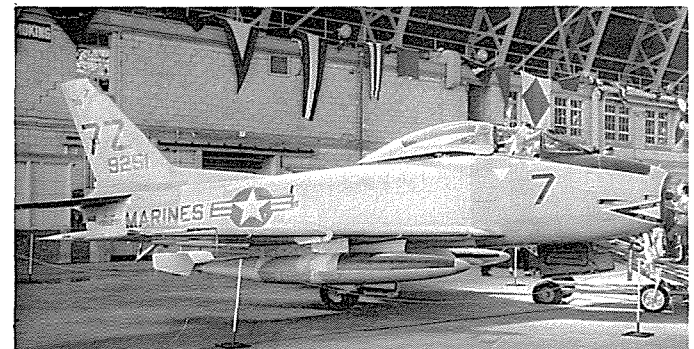
Douglas C-54D, 139112, 1959.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Grumman F9F-8, 127228, 1958.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



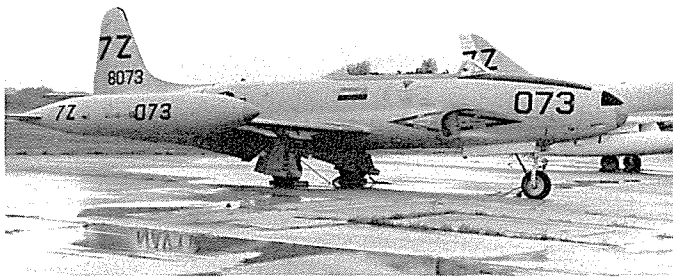
North American FJ-3M *Fury*, 139251, 1961.

(Photo by Tom Cuddy II)

Douglas C-118B, 131575, 1959.

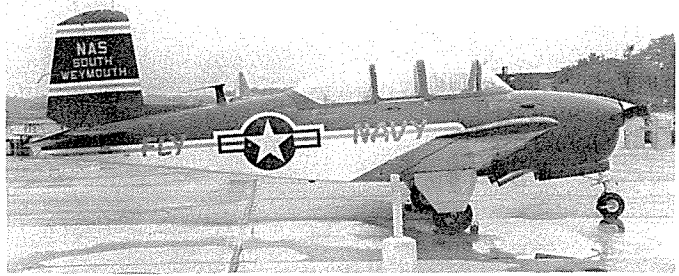
(Photo by R.W. Harrison)





Lockheed T-33B, 8073, 1967.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



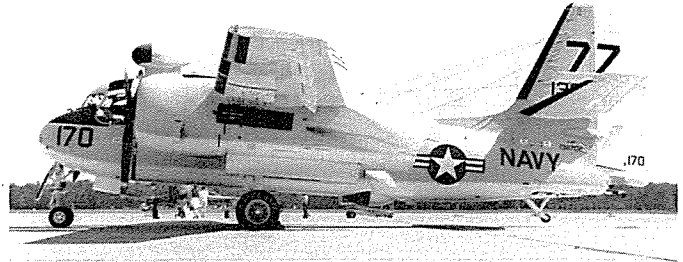
Beech T-34B, 140690, 1969.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Douglas TA-4B Skyhawk assigned to NAS South Weymouth in September 1969.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Grumman S-2F Tracker, 136702, 1967.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)

Grumman S2F-2 Tracker, 1961.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)





Sikorsky UH-34D, 150237, 1968.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Grumman US-2A "Station Hack" in 1971.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)

During June 1970, South Weymouth's carrier-based anti-submarine and attack squadrons were deactivated and in their place Patrol Squadron 92 was commissioned. In November VP-92 was equipped with Neptune Patrol aircraft and is now flyin P-3B *Orions*. The *Orion* is a state-of-the-art anti-submarine patrol aircraft second to none.

As a result of the closing of NAS Quonset Point, RI, in 1973, Helicopter Squadron 74 flying Seaking anti-submarine helicopters was assigned to South Weymouth. HS-74 was commissioned during 1970 at Quonset Point and maintained nine Seaking helicopters. In June of 1971, HS-74 cruised aboard the cruiser USS *America*, becoming the first reserve helicopter squadron to complete an operational cruise with the fleet. During 1974, five Seakings of HS-74 flew from South Weymouth to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, for anti-submarine warfare training exercises with regular naval units. This 2,000-mile trip established a distance record for a Navy helicopter movement. During the latter half of 1985, HS-74



Sikorsky SH-3A, 149690, 1969.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



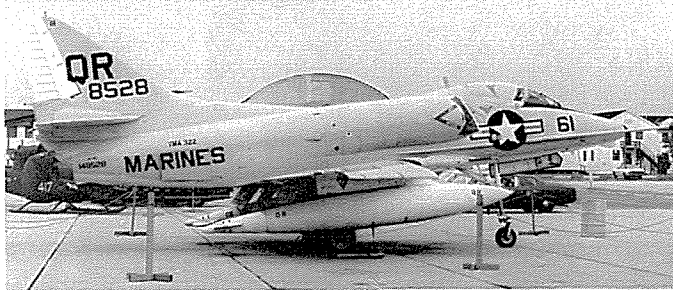
Beech UC-45J, 51189, 1971.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



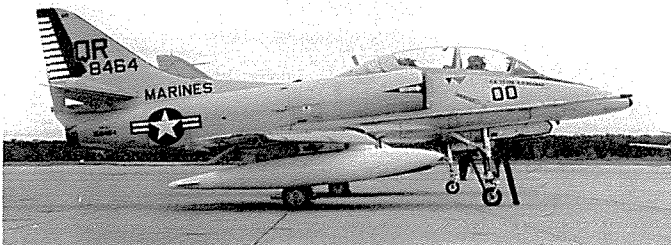
Lockheed SP-2H Neptune, VP-92, 1973.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Douglas A-4C Skyhawk, 148528, 1973.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



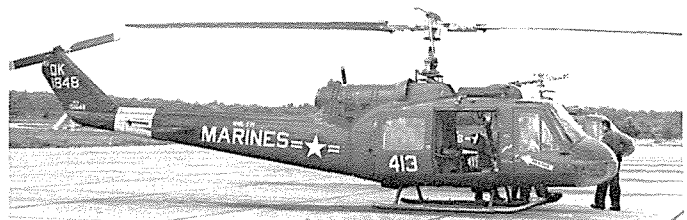
Douglas TA-4J, 158464, of VMA-322, in 1982.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Beech UC-12B, 161499, "Station Hack," 1982.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



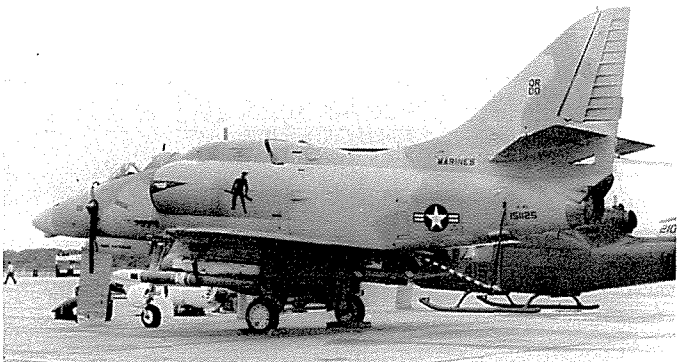
Bell UH-1E, 151848, HML-771, 1973.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Lockheed P-3A Orion, 151373, 1975.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



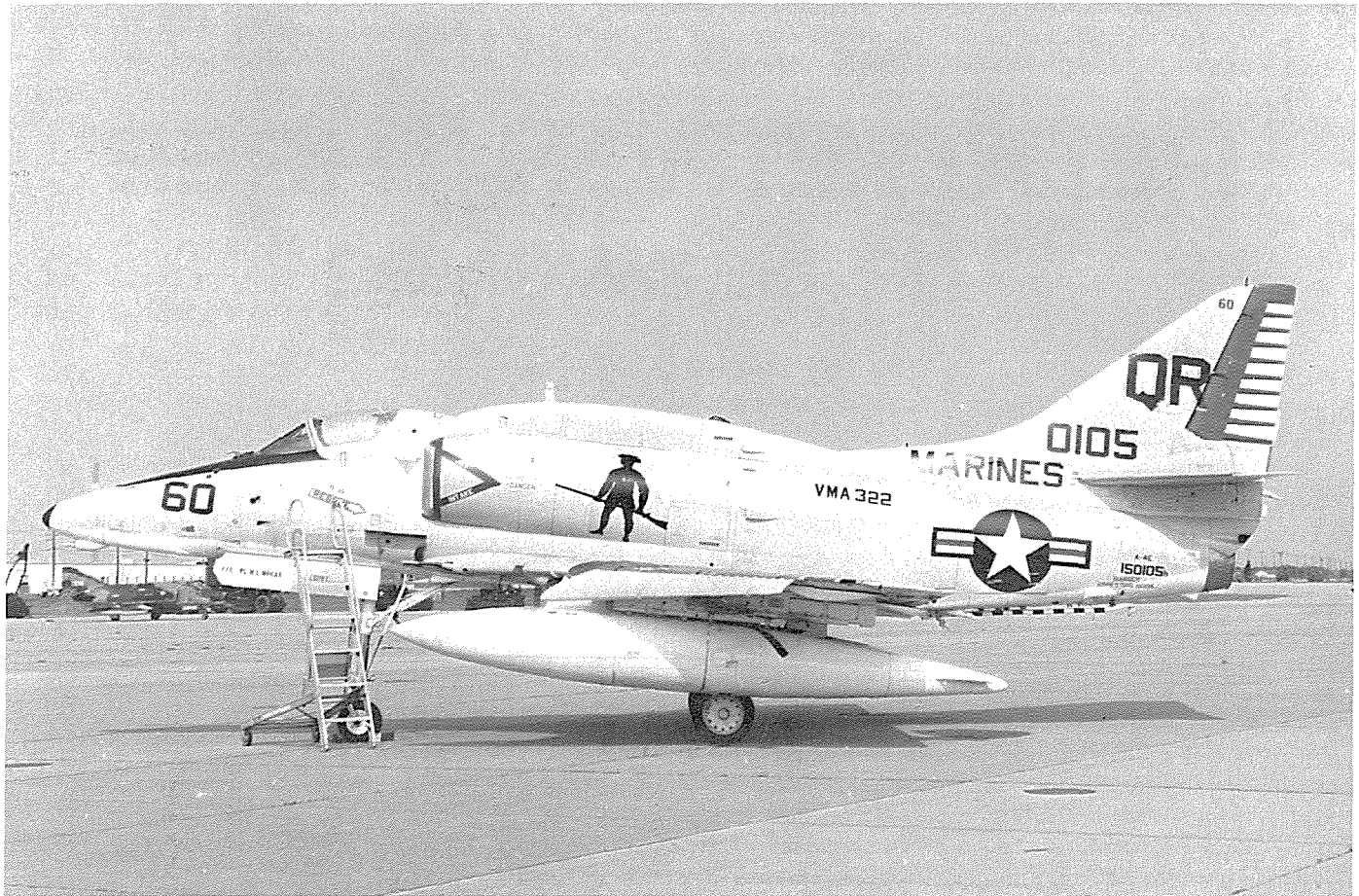
Douglas A-4E, 151125, of VMA-322, in 1978.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)

Sikorsky SH-3G, 149915, of HS-74 at Quonset Point, RI, in 1976.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)





Douglas A-4E Skyhawk, 150105, of VMA-322, 1977. (Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Lockheed P-3B, 153416, of VP-92, 1985.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)

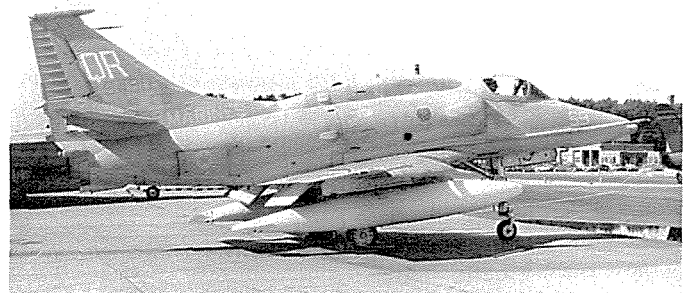
received Kaman *Seasprite* helicopters, one of the first reserve units to receive this type.

In addition to the Naval air activities at South Weymouth, a Marine detachment operates two reserve squadrons, one A-4M *Skyhawk* II squadron VMA-322 and a helicopter squadron HML-771. These two units train over 600 Marine Reservists. In addition to the normal training routine, the Marine Attack Squadron is considered a NATO backup unit and maintains a high degree of combat readiness.

It is hoped that this short article and collection of photographs will help give a little insight into the operations and equipment of a somewhat uncommon but not unique Naval Reserve Base.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS TO:

Naval Aviation News, September 1973; Prepared Public Relations History of NAS South Weymouth; They Were Dependable, Airship Operations World War II, published 1946.



Douglas A-4M, Skyhawk, 159486, last of a long line, 1983.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)



Kaman SH-2F of HSL-74, 1986.

(Photo by R.W. Harrison)