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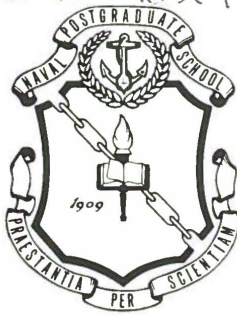
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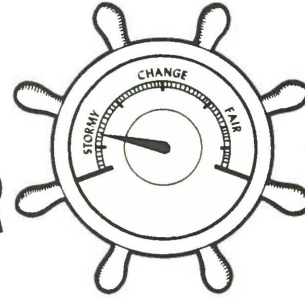
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The
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VOL. XVIII, NO. 2

27 January, 1975

EDITORS:

LT Ken HOLLEMON, SMC #1181

LT Eric BENSON, SMC #1088

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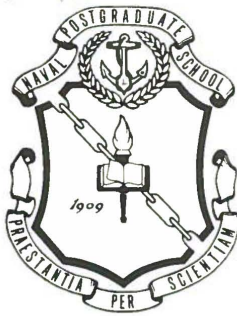
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Ernie is wrong, however, when he presumes that the Naval Aviation's future roles will include enough dog-fighting in bright sunlight to make a specialized hot rod fighter worth its salt within the Carrier Air Wing. In both Korea and Vietna, carriers enjoyed sea sanctuaries in which they substituted for land bases. The fact that the carriers served so well in this role is a testimonial to their inherent flexibility, mobility, and versatility. It is even a greater testimonial to the truly unique men who made them work in this fashion. But it's not the way they either should or will be used in the future, when the first order of business will be the Soviet Navy, the second order the blackading or opening of a sea lane of commerce somewhere, and the third laying aerial siege to some enemy ashore, and when any nation, small or large, may have a fleet of missile-firing speedboats handy.

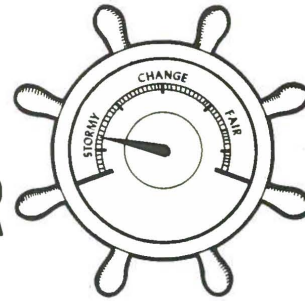
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Both authors paid little heed to one of the most important facets of all-that of carrier suitability. No matter how well an airplane flies and fights, its value to Naval Aviation is almost nil unless it works well around the ship. Poor carrier suitability is unacceptable, whether it be a high comeboard speed, a penchant for exploding tires, taking too many bolters and wave-offs, requiring more wind over the deck, or excessive pilot training, or special handling for armament loading or catapult positioning, or elevator spotting, or engine removals, or fuel management, or myriad other facets of that very intricate business. It is not merely a matter of making one aircraft work. They all have to work together, and they all have to live within the same general limits. When any one requires unique or special treatment, the flexibility and mobility of the carrier is diminished, and the overall effectiveness of all the airplanes is commensurately lowered. In recent years, the pendulum has swung far over on the side of special treatment for special airplanes, with the RASC marking the absolute limit of tolerability. Ernie's example of a whole deck full of A-4 aircraft is pertinent here. The ship that tries to operate that kind of an air wing today would be almost constantly circling into the wind for launch and recoveries and would be a sheer disaster area for heavy night or weather operations.

So both authors are right-and both wrong, I think. The Navy needs a new aircraft which is carrier suitable, cheap to buy, easy to maintain, capable of doing a lot of different missions in all kinds of weather, but which can still be a hot dog in a dogfight. The decision facing the Navy is neither a full endorsement of one extreme or the other. Instead, the real question is 'Can an aircraft be built which is a compromise of the two extremes, but which hasn't been compromised to death in the process?'

Many qualified and experienced authorities-from aircraft designers through test pilots on to hardened combat veterans think that it can be done. They point most forcefully to the F-4 as a good example of a compromise that worked. In combat, the F-4 has waxed the opposition (MIGs 15 thru 21) not because it could out turn them, but because its superior pilot could turn it well enough to get by and bring its superior weaponry to bear. As an interceptor, in its heyday, the F-4 was great. It remains great in this role, as well as in an almost pure attack role, throughout most of the Air Forces of the free world. A bad compromise airplane? I don't think so!

Can another good compromise fighter be developed and built? Of course it can. Can the YF-16/YF-17 prototypes be beefed up to meet the Navy requirements? Probably not. A better solution is to let the Navy have the lead, build the VFAX to Navy requirements, then scale down, not up, for the USAF needs. The Navy has built the two most successful tactical aircraft of their era, the F04 and the A-7, and the USAF has had superb service from their landbased variants. When you reverse that process, letting the USAF build the hot rod and then expect it to be satisfactorily grown into a carrier design, you have no precedent for success, and lots of evidence foredammng the effort. In spite of this evidence, the OSD paper analysts and the Congress have seen fit to dictate otherwise. The Navy has been ordered in unmistakable language to accept a YF-16/YF-17 type airplane, whether they like it or not, and have even been told not to call it a VFAX, but a 'Navy Air Combat Fighter'. I pray that our naval leaders will have enough intestinal fortitude to stick by their guns, to remind the analysts and the lawmakers of both the F-4 and the F-111 precedents, and to insist that neither the desert warfare experts nor the salesmen for hot dog tinkertoys be permitted to design naval aircraft of the future."