

VPI RENDEZVOUS 96 - VP INTERNATIONAL'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY

By
David Reade

With the departure of the last Maritime Patrol Aircraft, wagging its wings at the crowd of on-lookers as it flew off into the setting sun, came the end to a week of activities that will forever be remembered as "Rendezvous 96" to those that attended the 30th anniversary of VP International.

The week that was Rendezvous 96 began with the staggered arrival of participating aircrews from all over the world. They included active duty squadrons from the United States Navy, Canadian Forces, French Navy, Royal New Zealand Air Force, German Navy, British Royal Air Force, the Netherlands Navy and the Spanish Air Force. The remaining number of attendees were from other MPA-related commands and activities, as well as personnel exchange programs and civilian retirees. In all, over 600 serving members of VPI attended the reunion, to partake in the celebration of thirty years of VP International.

Some of the retired service members attending, travelled long distances to get to the reunion: from as far away as New Zealand and across Canada and the United States. Wherever they came from, it was their commitment, as members, to VP International that drew them to this place in time. They came to reminisce with their crewmates about the past thirty years of that which was once a unique experiment at boosting morale, fellowship and leadership, to what it has become today. They wished to remind themselves of their prior service in the Maritime Patrol forces, and to celebrate with new members the future: the next thirty years of VP International.

Rendezvous 96 was not just a reunion to renew old friendships and establish new ones, but a forum for the MPA community to exchange new ideas, and share information and experience, in the ever-changing world of the post Cold War. For this, VP International sponsored an MPA seminar with presentations that covered Maritime Patrol Search and Rescue, topics on the status of new Littoral

ASW concepts, and reports on new sensor-system technology providing enhanced mission capabilities to Maritime Patrol Aircraft in the near future.

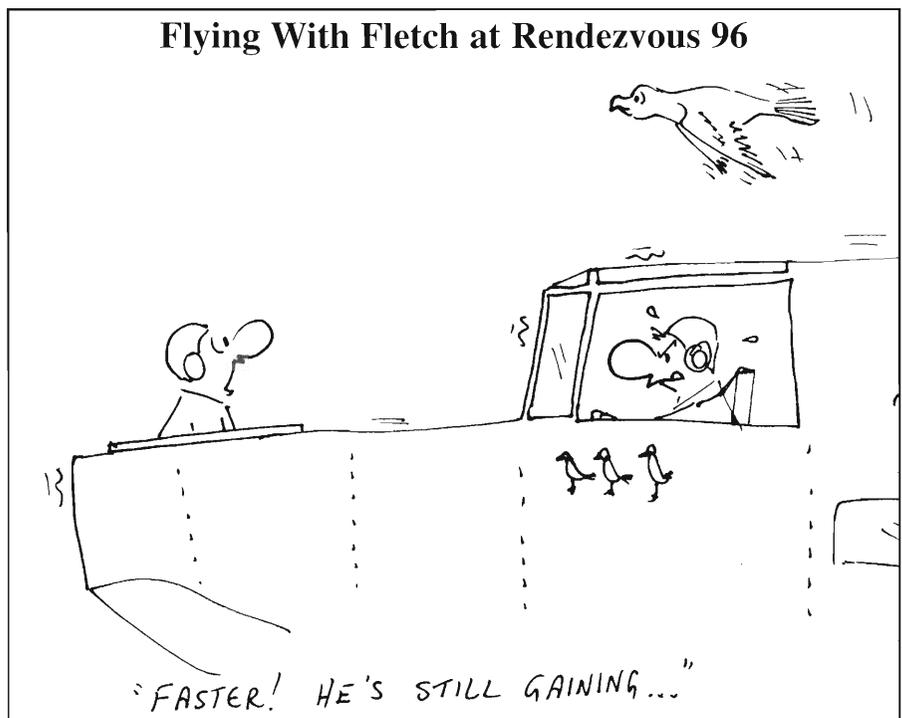
The forum is in keeping with VPI's role of stimulating and promoting the exchange of information about MPA throughout the community. This is evident through the publishing of Maritime Patrol Aviation magazine: the voice of VP International, and of the MPA community.

VPI further supported the MPA community at Rendezvous 96 by sponsoring an ASW exercise. This exercise provided aircrews the opportunity to conduct ASW operations against a diesel submarine in a littoral environment. The Rendezvous 96 SUBEX is an example of VPI's commitment to the community by arranging for a Canadian "O" Class diesel submarine to conduct ASW operations: a practice opportunity that is rare enough today, in a climate of dwindling budgets.

Besides the MPA seminar, Rendezvous 96 included a schedule of events that comprised a "meet and

greet" social hour, an international night with delicious samples and tastes from the participating nations, a champagne brunch, as well as a dress anniversary dinner of lobster and fine wine. Other activities encompassed a sports day, static display of various Maritime Patrol Aircraft from the participating countries, and industrial displays by a number of aviation vendors that manufacture systems, parts and components associated with, and in support of, Maritime Patrol Aircraft. They ranged from an advance peek at Lockheed Martin's proposed next-generation Maritime Patrol Aircraft, ORION 2000, a fascinating look at the AN/FQX-3 Fast Time Analysis System from Scientific-Atlanta, that provides fast, post-flight mission analysis, to component aircraft parts produced by IMP, and a number of displays dealing with maintenance support of Maritime Patrol Aircraft, and training of their crews.

Despite the social activities planned for the VPI reunion, there was also an amount of work to be done. This comprised a general meeting of



VPI with representatives of all the VPI Wings in attendance. The meeting began with an announcement of "engines on" and a hearty welcome by the current president Major Bert Campbell. A series of reports was issued beginning with the President, the Treasurer and Membership Secretary, with a later report from the editorial group of the VPI magazine Maritime Patrol Aviation. Then, each of the thirty international VPI Wings gave a report on the status of its organization.

After this business, a number of motions were tabled concerning the direction of future membership, the raising of membership fees, and the establishment of new Wings in other countries. There was a lively debate as to how to increase membership, that included suggestions of lowering the required 2000 hours flying time of regular memberships or of establishing associate membership with lower hour-requirements. There was some discussion as to different colored pins to differentiate those new associate members from long serving ones. A motion was finally carried to have each wing representative report back to their respective organizations for consensus as to which way to proceed.

Other VPI business included an announcement of the upcoming International MPA Symposium sponsored by the US Navy, and hosted by Captain J.A. Carman, Commander COMPATWING TEN at NAS Whidbey Island Washington (USA).

Another motion was tabled by P2000 founder Col (Retd) Herb Smale,

showing support for a proposed VP International Memorial Monument. The VPI Memorial Monument is to honor crew members of land-based Maritime Patrol Aircraft who have lost their lives in the performance of their duties while serving in all theaters of maritime flying operations during the past thirty years. It is estimated that over three hundred Maritime Patrol Aircrew have been killed during MPA operations during that period. With a show of hands, the international VPI attendance voted to approve the formation of a steering committee to oversee the project, and acquire funding to produce a monument, with the aim of dedicating it by the fall of 1997.

The last order of business was the official induction of some thirty new members into VP International. In fact, within the week after the reunion itself, another 105 made application, raising the total membership to over 4500 members as of June 5th 1996.

Additionally, a number of senior, active-duty members of VPI were recognized for attaining over 8760 flying hours in Maritime Patrol Aircraft. That's approximately one year in the air. The long-standing members were awarded their gold VPI pins as a recognizable symbol of their achievements.

With a final exchange of gifts and plaques to senior VPI staff and guests, and the remainder of VPI business being concluded, the president of VPI announced "engines off" and the end of the international VPI general meeting.

In retrospect, Rendezvous 96 was everything it was expected to be and more. Although a number of aircrew

failed to show up as expected, due to aircraft mechanical problems and, in one case, a smashed windshield in flight, there was some wonder where the absentees would have fitted in, judging by the number of bodies crowding into the numerous functions.

As a reunion, it served its members well. One retiree ran into comrades he hadn't seen in twenty-five years and one he hadn't talked to in forty! As an international meeting, major policy matters were addressed to help guide the organization into the next century. As for the MPA Community, Rendezvous 96 provided a forum to further the exchange of knowledge and experience among the patrol fraternity in an effort to adapt to the ever-increasing MPA tasks of the 21st Century.



About The Author

David Reade (P-3 Publications) is a free-lance journalist and consultant specializing on Maritime Patrol Aircraft. He has written numerous articles on P-3 Orions and S-3 Vikings as to their roles, missions, capabilities and systems for the international MPA community. For several years he has been a contributing associate for Lockheed Martin's Airborne Log magazine, and is a regular contributor to Maritime Patrol Aviation.

He produces an informative P-3 Bureau Number list (utilized by the USN and the P-3 community) and recently wrote a book on the P-3 Orion, to be published in the near future.



Fourteen Aerospace and Avionics companies participated in the Industrial displays held on 1 June. Seen in this photo L-R Orst Kochinoff, VPI Halifax, Mike Garvey, Manager International Marketing IMP Aerospace, and BGen B.N. Cameron, Commander Canada's Maritime Air Group.



The newly formed Lincoln Wing of VPI received official accreditation as Wing President MWO Phil Holdway was presented with the Wing Charter by VPI President Major Bert Campbell.