

WWII Era

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, U.S. military leaders became concerned that the West Coast lacked the kind of aircraft needed to patrol for submarines and mines. This duty was to fall to the U.S. Navy.

Even as the base remained under the jurisdiction of the Army, the Navy got to work rounding up some of the key personnel behind the old lighter-than-air aircraft program. Gradually they began to return to Moffett Field.

Lighter-Than-Air (LTA) operations on the West Coast centered around the three main operating bases: Santa Ana, CA, Moffett Field, CA, and Tillamook, OR with NAS Moffett Field being the first operational LTA air station to be established after hostilities began. The first squadron assigned to the West Coast was Airship Patrol Squadron 32. The squadron was established under command of LCDR George Watson on January 31, 1942, at Sunnyvale Air Station. (It was to be re-designated Blimp Squadron (ZP) 32 on June 3, 1944.)

A directive was signed by the Chief of Naval Operations on December 29, 1941, authorizing the formation of ZP-32. Work began immediately on the former Army Air Corps' airships TC-13 and -14 to make them fit for service and prepare them for transportation from NAS Lakehurst to NAS Moffett Field. These two airships were the nucleus for ZP-32's operations. The day after the squadron was established, TC-14 made her first test flight. A week later, on February 8, TC-13 was placed in service and flown by the squadron.

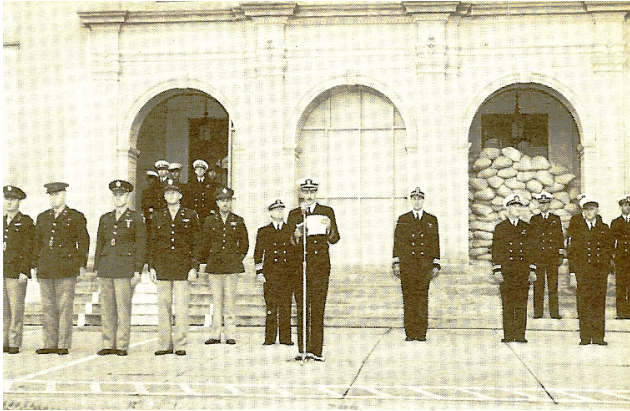
ZP-32 had the distinction of launching the first LTA patrol off the Pacific Coast in World War II. The first mission for TC-14 (pictured) was on February 4th when she made a wartime patrol with other units of the Pacific fleet. On February 23rd an enemy submarine operating off the coast of California shelled an oil field near Santa Barbara.

ZP-32 sent TC-14 to search for the submarine and to escort any merchant ships in the area. The airship flew from NAS Moffett Field to Morro Bay and operated in the area on February 24. She escorted several tankers and searched for the submarine without any definite results. Even



though the airship did not locate the submarine, the squadron was able to demonstrate its capability to respond to crisis situations.

The Navy assumed control of Moffett Field from the Army in a ceremony on April 16, 1942, officially re-commissioning it to U.S. Naval Air Station Sunnyvale. Six blimps



were on hand for this event, TC-13, TC-14, and four L-Class blimps; L-4, L-5, L-6 and L-8. Four days later it was renamed Naval Air Station, Moffett Field. Presiding over the ceremonies was the station's new commanding officer, CAPT D. M. Mackey, the man who had taken the first official order at the original 1933 commissioning of Moffett Field, logging in the now-famous command that concluded, "*set the watches and*

pipe down." With the onset of war, NAS Moffett Field was suddenly transformed from a base for training Air Corps cadets to the Naval Airship Training Command responsible for teaching Navy officers and enlisted men how to operate blimps. Within months as many as 20 blimps were on duty at the base.

During the war there were various reorganizations within the LTA structure. Fleet Airships, Pacific had been originally established as **Airship Patrol Group Three** on October 1, 1942, and was then redesignated **Fleet Airship Wing (FASW) 3** on December 1. On July 15, 1943, under command of Commander Scott E. Peck, the Wing was again redesignated as **Fleet Airships, Pacific** with administrative duties and as **Fleet Airship Wing Three** with operational responsibilities. In this dual role, the command reported to **Commander Fleet Air, West Coast**. This dual-hatted command organization continued until January 23, 1946, when both organizations were disestablished.



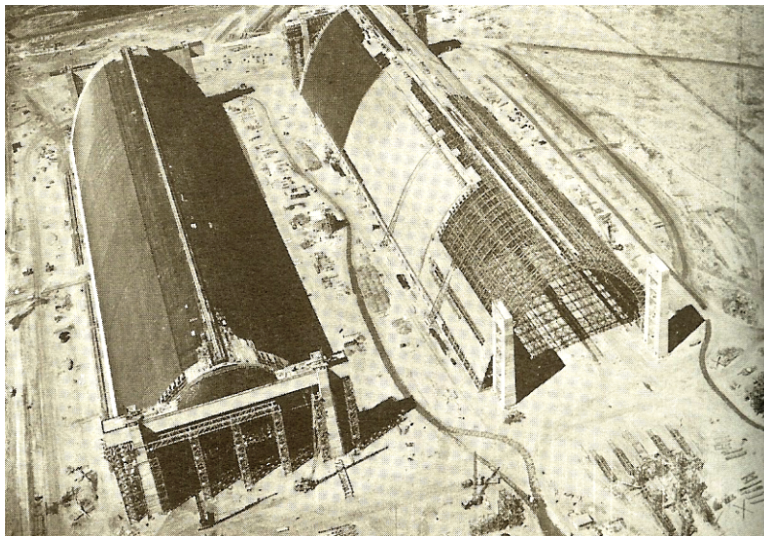
Fleet Airship Wing Three, consisting of three squadrons, ZP-31, ZP-32 and ZP-33, was formed in October, 1942, with headquarters (Blimp Headquarters Squadron 3 (**BlimpRon 3**)) at NAS Moffett Field. **ZP-32** continued to operate out of NAS Moffett with 12 airships, along with the Free Balloon School and **ZP-31** was based at NAS Santa Ana, California with 12 airships. **ZP-33** was based at NAS Tillamook, Oregon with eight airships. Auxiliary airfields were at Del Mar, Lompoc, Watsonville, and Eureka, CA, North Bend and Astoria, OR, and Shelton and Quillayute, WA.

Unlike the massive dirigibles, the blimps and training balloons were not equipped with *Sparrowhawk* aircraft. They were however, stocked with live carrier pigeons, which were used to dispatch messages from on high. At the "lighter-than-air school", Sailors learned everything from how to rig and pilot blimps to how to maintain them. Part of the Sailors' training also was the care and feeding of the carrier pigeons.

Training for pilots was particularly intense. Before they could receive their official designation as a Naval Aviator (airship), aviation cadets had to first qualify as a pilot of free balloons. The massive interior of Hangar One, 198 feet high, proved a valuable area for this kind of training in any kind of weather.



But even this monstrous structure was not sufficient to handle the demand for storage and training. In 1942, two more hangars were added to the base. Hangar Two was constructed in a rapid 372 days, Hangar Three went up in 208. Because of a wartime shortage of steel, they were primarily made of wood and concrete.



That same year NAS Moffett Field became not only the place where blimp pilots were trained, but also where blimps were assembled. The vertical and horizontal fins and the elevators and rudders were manufactured. Moffett's newly established Assembly and Repair Department had the job of assembling L-type and regular K-type airships. This would prove to be the peak of LTA production in U.S. history.

In additions to training pilots, the LTA squadrons at NAS Moffett Field were responsible for patrolling the Pacific coastline. Following the direction set by Naval Airship Training Command at Lakehurst, NJ, Fleet Airships Pacific Tactical Unit (FAPTU) was established on March 20, 1944 to train pilots and crews in airship Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) techniques in the use of MAD (Magnetic Anomaly Detection), Navigation and Carrier Landing Procedures. The unit operated under control of Commander, Fleet Airships Pacific. After training 64 combat air crews, the unit was disestablished on June 27, 1945.

FLEET AIRSHIPS, PACIFIC

Command Structure – May 1945

Commander Fleet Airships Pacific – CAPT H. N. Coulter

Commander Fleet Airship Wing 3 – CAPT H. N. Coulter

BlimpHedRon 3 – Commander V. L. Smith

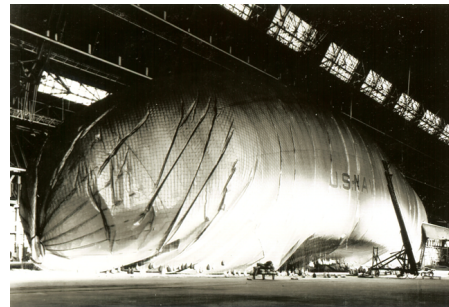
BlimpRon 31, 8 ZNP – LCDR W. F. Lineberger

BlimpRon 32, 8 ZNP – LCDR R. E. Huse

BlimpRon 33, 8 ZNP – LCDR F. N. Lein

In mid-1942, the Navy designated NAS Moffett Field a joint LTA and HTA (heavier than air) facility. At first the designation had little impact. But during the following two years, the HTA program grew as the LTA program began to decline.

In January 1944, the last airship arrived at Moffett for assembly. Two months later, Moffett Field graduated its last training class for pilots and crew. In August 1947, a blimp went down off the Cape of Mendocino. No lives were lost, but it would be the last flight for the LTA program at Moffett. That same month, the last blimp at Moffett Field was deflated.



At their peak of operations during World War II, U.S. Navy airships were patrolling an area of about 3,000,000 square miles off the Atlantic, Pacific, and Mediterranean Coasts. Over seventy-five thousand vessels were escorted in the Atlantic and over eleven thousand in the Pacific. Of the airships assigned to the Fleet Units, eighty-seven per cent were in operation or in readiness for operation at all times — a record “availability factor” for military aircraft, and only one airship was lost through enemy action. Their slogan was not “They Were Expendable” but “They Were Dependable.”

During the War, NAS Moffett Field was home to several HTA Utility Squadrons (**VJ-7A, VJ-14, VJ-17, VJ-19, VU-2, VU-17 and VU-18**) whose main job was to tow targets for gunnery practice, in addition to providing: torpedo photo and recovery, fighter director practices, radar/radio calibration, submarine coverage, spotting for weapon firing practice, classified radar operations, special transportation, fleet mail delivery, patrol, convoy coverage, open ocean search, rescues at sea, and photography. These squadrons employed Grumman *F6F-5 Hellcats*, Douglas *JD-1 Invaders*, Martin *JM-1 Marauders*, and Grumman *J2F-6 Ducks* in the performance of their operations. These squadrons transitioned in and out of NAS Moffett Field from 1944 to 1947, supporting fleet operations throughout the Western Pacific

NAS Moffett Field was also home to several Patrol Bomber Squadrons (VPB) flying Lockheed *PV-1 Venturas*, and *PV-2 Harpoons* as they trained for the coming invasion of Japan.



Those squadrons were **VPB-142**, **VPB-144**, **VPB-146**, **VPB-148**, **VPB-150**, **VPB-152**, **VPB-153** and **VPB-198**. These squadrons arrived at NAS Moffett Field throughout 1944 and, were forward deployed in early 1945 for bases throughout the Pacific Theater, specifically the Aleutian Island and South West Pacific Areas of Operations. VPB-198 was established in September, 1944 and became the Operational Training Unit to train and supply pilots and crews for all operational squadrons in the Pacific. Their operational history follows:

PATROL – BOMBER SQUADRONS AT MOFFETT FIELD

VPB-142

- 1 June 1943: established at NAS Whidbey Island as **VB-142** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*
- Dec 43 – Jul 44: operated in combat zone from Tarawa and Majuro.
- 5 Sept 1944: assigned to Moffett Field.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-142**.
According to the *Moffett News*, 10 Nov 44, page 1, LCDR J. H. Guthrie assumed command
- Jan 45: started conversion to PV-2 *Harpoon*.
- 1 Mar 1945: assigned to Kaneohe, HI.
2 Apr 1945: PV-2 (BuNo 37096) lost a wing during gunnery practice. The crew of 6 were killed. The pilot was LTjg Allen W. Keagle.
- May – Sept 45: operated in combat zone from Tinian, and on 27 June, sank the Japanese submarine I-165.
- 15 May 1946: redesignated **VP-142**.
- 14 Jun 1946: Squadron disestablished.

VPB-144

- 1 July 1943: established at NAS Alameda as **VB-144** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*.
- Dec 43 – Sept 44: operated in combat zone from Tarawa and Roi.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-144**.
- 1 Nov 1944: reformed at NAS Whidbey Island with PV-2 *Harpoon*.
- 3 Mar 1945: Detached to Moffett Field for training. (not officially assigned) According to the *Moffett News* 16 Mar 45, page 1,8, LCDR C. L. Thies assumed command.
- 8 Apr 45: started deployment to Hawaii.
- Jun 45 to May 46: operated in combat zone from Eniwetok.
- 15 May 1946: redesignated **VP-144**.
- 15 Nov 1946: redesignated **VP-ML-4**.
- 1 Sept 1948: redesignated **VP-4** (2nd).

VPB-146

- 15 Jul 1943: established at NAS Whidbey Island as **V-146** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*.
- Jun 44 – Feb 45: operated in combat zone from Admiralty Islands, Morotai & Los Negros Island.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-146**.
- 15 Apr 1945: assigned to Moffett Field and converted to PV-2 *Harpoon*. According to the *Moffett News* 27 Apr 1945, pages 1, 8, LCDR V. L. Schrager assumed command.
- 30 Jul 1945: assigned to NAS Alameda.
- 15 May 1946: redesignated **VP-146**.
- 15 Nov 1946: redesignated **VP-ML-6**.
- 1 Sep 1948: redesignated **VP-6** (3rd).
- 31 May 1993: disestablished.

VPB-148

- 16 Aug 1943: established at NAS Alameda as **VB-148** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*.
- Apr 44 – Oct 44: operated in combat zone from Munda and South Georgia.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-148**.
- 10 Jan 1945: reformed at Whidbey.
- Apr 1945: assigned to Moffett Field (awaiting transportation), with LCDR A. B. Dusenberry in command (24 Jan 45 to 1946)
- 30 May 1945: departed for Hawaii. 5 June 1945: assigned to Kaneohe.
- Jun 45: started conversion to PV-2 *Harpoon*.
- 15 May 1946: redesignated **VP-148**.
- 15 Jun 1946: disestablished.

VPB-150

- 15 Sep 1943: established at NAS Alameda as **VB-150** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*.
- Jul 44 – Mar 45: operated in combat zone from Tarawa and Tinian.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-150**.
- 5 May 1945: assigned to Moffett Field. Converted to PV-2 *Harpoon*. According to the *Moffett News* 25 May 45, p. 1, 8, LCDR J. W. Lenney assumed command
- 20 Jul 1945: disestablished.

VPB-152

- 1 Apr 1944: established at NAS Clinton, OK as **VB-152** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-152**.
- 23 Nov 1944: assigned to NAS Alameda.
- 1 – 25 Jan 1945: one of several squadron assigned to Moffett for training. According to the *Moffett News* 22 Dec 44, p. 1, 2, LCDR G. C. Atteberry, assumed command
- (1st CO wits CDR L. J. Stone)
- 17 Nov 1945: assigned to Kaneohe.
- Apr 45 – Nov 45: operated in combat zone from Peleliu, and on 2 Aug 1945, patrol flight with LTjg W. C. Gwin in command spotted survivors from *USS Indianapolis*.
- 16 May 46: redesignated **VP-152**.
- 16 Jun 46: disestablished.

VPB-153

- 15 Apr 1944: established at NAS Clinton, OK as **VP-153** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-153**.
- 9 Nov 1944: assigned to Moffett Field. Converted to PV-2 *Harpoon*. According to the *Moffett News* 24 Nov 44, p. 1, CDR E. M. West as CO
- 24 Mar 1945: assigned to Kaneohe.
- 1945: PV-2 (BuNo 37101) crashed on night take off. Crew of 5 killed.
- Jun 45 – Oct 45: operated in combat zone from Agana, Guam.
- 15 May 1946: redesignated **VP-153**.
- 14 Jun 1946: disestablished.

VPB-198

- 12 Sep 1944: established at Moffett Field as **VB-198** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*. According to the *Moffett News* 15 Sept 44, p. 1, 12, the following were COs of Patrol Bomber Training Units at Moffett

- LT M. D. Trewhill, CO of bomber training unit.
- LT J. L. Longabaugh, CO of bomber servicing unit.
- LT J. H. Follmer, CO of bomber servicing unit.
- 1 Oct 1944: redesignated **VPB-198**.
- Apr 1945: started receiving PV-2 *Harpoon*.
- 1 Apr 1946: disestablished.

Unidentified VPB

According to the *Moffett News* 1 Sep 1944, p. 1, 12, a Patrol Bomber Squadron arrived at Moffett Field, with LCDR S. G. Schilling as CO and LT C. E. Koontz as XO. Current best guess is that this unit was **VPB-140**.

- 21 Apr 1943: established at NAS Alameda as **VB-140** equipped with PV-1 *Ventura*.
- Aug 43 – Feb 44: operated in combat zone from Munda and Guadalcanal.
- Apr 1944: assigned to NAS Alameda for conversion to PV-2 *Harpoon*., however the conversion was cancelled because of PV-2 delivery delays.
- 1 Oct 44: redesignated **VPB-140**.
- 18 Oct 44: assigned to Hutchinson, KS for conversion to PB4Y-1.
- 20 Nov 44: redesignated **VPB-123**.
- LCDR S. G. Schilling, CO replaced LCDR V. Williams.
- 15 May 1946: redesignated **VP-123**.
- 1 Oct 1946: disestablished.