

## VPB-91

### Lineage

Established as Patrol Squadron NINETY ONE (VP-91) on 1 December 1941.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron NINETY ONE (VPB-91) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 2 April 1946.

### Squadron Insignia and Nickname

A photograph on file for VP-91 in the Aviation History Branch squadron insignia archives showed what appeared to be a Disney-like Dumbo elephant, with outstretched ears, astride two bombs. The figure



*The squadron's insignia.*

was in a circular patch with the squadron designation VP below the right ear, and 91 above it. Above and outside the design was the logo UP-FLOATS. Colors: background, dark blue; outlines and letters, gold. The reputed insignia tied in with one of the squadron's primary missions in WWII, that of Dumbo missions to retrieve downed airmen. The squadron achieved a record on this score, retrieving 80 airmen from the water during two tours in the South Pacific. Unfortunately, no documentation survives to verify the authenticity of the insignia or its approval by CNO.

Nickname: None on record.

### Chronology of Significant Events

**1 Dec 1941:** VP-91 was established at NAS Norfolk, Va., under the operational control of PatWing-8, as a seaplane squadron flying the PBV-5 Catalina. On 15 December 1941, the squadron was relocated to Alameda, Calif. Upon arrival preparations were made for the transpac to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, where VP-91 would be located to reinforce the patrol squadrons depleted by the Japanese attack.

**28 Feb 1942:** VP-91 departed San Francisco, Calif., for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, with the last aircraft arriving safely by 2 March 1942. Upon arrival the squadron came under the operational control of PatWing-1. VP-91 remained in the Hawaii area through early September flying local patrols under COMNAVAIR-BASEDEFENSE.

**4 Sep 1942:** VP-91 began relocating south into the active war zone, arriving at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides Islands, on 13 September 1942. Operations from this area were conducted while based aboard *Mackinac* (AVP 13) in the Second Channel, under the operational control of FAW-1. On 2 November 1942, with the departure of *Mackinac*, the officers of the squadron were berthed aboard *Curtiss* (AV 4), while the enlisted personnel were berthed aboard *Tangier* (AV 8).

**27 Oct 1942:** Lieutenant Melvin K. Atwell and crew were flying a night reconnaissance mission in the vicinity of the Solomon Islands when they spotted a large vessel 30 miles away. They determined that the dark outline of a large ship was moving in an easterly direction at high speed. Flying closer to investigate, the ship was seen to enter a low overcast and stop. Two passes at low altitude failed to identify the ship. Atwell climbed back to 1,500 feet and when two miles from the ship was bracketed by two bursts of AA fire. He immediately put the aircraft into a dive, releasing his four 500-pound bombs over the ship at 650 to 600 feet. Two bombs were seen to explode aft of the forward smokestack of the ship, which appeared to be an Aoba class heavy cruiser. The concussion of the explosions damaged the aircraft, which barely pulled out of the dive at 20 feet above the surface of the sea. Atwell chose not to linger in the vicinity of the warship, as he had developed several fuel leaks. As they headed for home base a large orange flash was seen in the distance in the vicinity of the target, followed by a larger explosion 10 minutes later. For his courageous single-handed attack on the enemy warship Lieutenant Atwell was awarded the Navy Cross.

**13 Nov 1942:** Five of the squadron aircraft were flown to Vanikoro, supported by tender *Mackinac* (AVP 13) in Peon Bay. On 2 December 1942, *Mackinac* was relieved by *Ballard* (AVD 10), and returned to Espiritu Santo. The detachment of five aircraft and six crews remained with *Ballard*, flying sector searches from Vanikoro, while the seven aircraft

remaining at Espiritu Santo aboard *Mackinac* flew sectors from that location.

**Mar 1943:** VP-91 was relieved for return to the continental U.S. The squadron was reformed at NAS San Diego, Calif., under the operational control of FAW-14.

**9 Aug 1943:** VP-91 conducted its transpac to Hawaii, with the last aircraft arriving safely at NAS Kaneohe on 18 August 1943. Here the squadron remained until 1 October 1943, when a detachment of six aircraft was sent to Johnson Island for antishipping patrols in support of the Task Force 14 raid on Wake Island from 5 to 6 October.

**29 Oct 1943:** VP-91 began the deployment from NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii, in three-aircraft elements to Espiritu Santo. Upon arrival on 10 November 1943, the squadron came under the operational control of FAW-1, supported by tenders *Wright* (AV 1) and *Chandeleur* (AV 10). Three days later, a detachment of six aircraft was sent to Suva, Fiji. A second detachment of three aircraft was sent to Halavo Bay, leaving three aircraft and six crews to conduct sector patrols from Espiritu Santo. Crews and aircraft were rotated frequently between all three sites.

**1 Jan 1944:** The Halavo Bay detachment was relieved, and the aircraft and crews redistributed with six PBYS at Suva, aboard *Mackinac* (AVP 13), and seven PBYS at Espiritu Santo, aboard *Chandeleur* (AV 10). Duties consisted primarily of convoy escort and aircraft maintenance.

**26 Mar 1944:** VP-91 was relieved by VP-54, and dispatched to Tulagi Island, Halavo Bay Seaplane Base. Shortly after arrival, five aircraft were detached to Treasury Island, three aircraft were sent to Green Island, and two were sent to Emirau Island. Duties of the squadron at this time consisted primarily of air-sea rescue missions and miscellaneous utility work for Commander Air Northern Solomons. On 27 May 1944, the Treasury Island detachment of five aircraft was sent to Green Island to augment the three aircraft present, reverting to search sector and antishipping patrols. The augmented detachment was supported by tenders *Coos Bay* (AVP 25) and *Chincoteague* (AVP 24).

**15 Jun 1944:** VP-91 was relieved at Green Island by VP-44. The eight aircraft of the detachment were flown to Halavo Bay Seaplane Base, where the squadron was reunited to prepare for transfer back to the continental U.S. VP-91 departed the combat zone on 21 July 1944 in elements of three aircraft, bound for NAS San Diego, Calif., via NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii.

**10 Sep 1944:** VP-91 was reformed at NAS San Diego, Calif., under the operational control of FAW-14. While training of new personnel was underway, the squadron was redesignated VPB-91.

**15 Oct 1944:** VPB-91 was relocated to NAS Corpus Christi, Tex., to learn how to process Naval Aviators and combat air crews through an advanced training course for combat replacement crews flying the PBM Mariner. On completion of the course on 13 December 1944, the squadron was transferred to NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., under the operational control of FAW-6. Here the squadron remained until the end of the war, training replacement crews.

**2 Apr 1946:** VP-91 was disestablished at NAS Whidbey Island, Wash.

### Home Port Assignments

Location	Date of Assignment
NAS Norfolk, Va.	1 Dec 1941
NAS Alameda	15 Dec 1941
NAS Ford Island, Hawaii	2 Mar 1942
NAS San Diego, Calif.	Mar 1943
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	18 Aug 1943
NAS San Diego, Calif.	Jul 1944
NAS Corpus Christi, Tex.	15 Oct 1944
NAS Whidbey Island, Wash.	13 Dec 1944

### Commanding Officers

	Date Assumed Command
LCDR T. U. Sisson	1 Dec 1941
LCDR Joe B. Paschal	Jan 1942
LCDR James O. Cobb	Nov 1942
LCDR E. L. Farrington	18 Apr 1943
LT Edwin M. Grant	14 Sep 1944
LT E. B. Thompson	13 Dec 1944
LCDR V. V. Utgoff	21 Mar 1945
LCDR Harold P. Gerdon	28 Jun 1945

### Aircraft Assignment

Type of Aircraft	Date Type First Received
PBY-5	Dec 1942
PBY-5A	Dec 1944
PBM-3S	Oct 1944

### Major Overseas Deployments

Date of Departure	Date of Return	Wing	Base of Operations	Type of Aircraft	Area of Operations
28 Feb 1942	*	FAW-2	Ford Island	PBY-5	EastPac
4 Sep 1942	*	FAW-1	Espiritu Santo <i>Mackinac</i> (AVP 13)	PBY-5	SoPac

**Major Overseas Deployments—Continued**

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
2 Dec 1942	Mar 1943	FAW-1	Curtiss (AV 4) Tangier (AV 8) Vanikoro	PBY-5	SoPac
9 Aug 1943	*	FAW-2	Mackinac (AVP 13) Ballard (AVD 10) Kaneohe	PBY-5	EastPac
1 Oct 1943	*	FAW-2	Johnson Isl.	PBY-5	EastPac
10 Nov 1943	*	FAW-1	Espiritu Santo Wright (AV 1) Chandeleur (AV 10) Mackinac (AVP 13) Coos Bay (AVP 25) Chincoteague (AVP 24)	PBY-5	SoPac
26 Mar 1944	21 Jul 1944	FAW-1	Tulagi	PBY-5	SoPac
27 Mar 1944†	27 May 1944	FAW-1	Treasury Isl.	PBY-5	SoPac
27 Mar 1944†	15 Jun 1944	FAW-1	Emirau	PBY-5	SoPac
27 Mar 1944†	15 Jun 1944	FAW-1	Green Island Coos Bay (AVP 25) Chincoteague (AVP 24)	PBY-5	SoPac
15 Jun 1944	21 Jul 1944	FAW-1	Halavo Bay	PBY-5	SoPac

\* Continued combat deployment in the South Pacific, moving from base to base.

† The squadron conducted split deployments to two or more sites on the same dates.

**Wing Assignments**

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
PatWing-8		1 Dec 1941
PatWing-1/ FAW-1‡		2 Mar 1942
FAW-14		Mar 1943
FAW-2		9 Aug 1943
FAW-1		29 Oct 1943
FAW-14		21 Jul 1944
Naval Air Training Command		15 Oct 1944
FAW-6		13 Dec 1944

**Wing Assignments**

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>

‡ Patrol Wings (PatWings) were redesignated Fleet Air Wings (FAWs) on 1 November 1942.

**Unit Awards Received**

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>
NUC	15 Sep 1942 – 1 Mar 1943



*A squadron PBY-5 refueling from a tender, October 1942 (Courtesy Richard C. Knott Collection via Dave Walkinshaw).*