

NEW JERSEY-BUILT: 13 FAST AIRCRAFT CARRIERS THAT SERVED IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY BETWEEN 1927 AND 2009.

PART VI: THE LAST CARRIER – USS KITTY HAWK (CVA/CV-63) 1961-2009

B: Post-Vietnam

By Captain Lawrence B. Brennan, JAGC, USN (Ret.)

POST VIETNAM COMBAT OPERATIONS (1973-1978)

*[This is the final entry in a series of articles begun in the summer issue of NJPH, Aug. 2008, Vol. 33, No. 3, Whole No. 171 and continued in the November 2008 (Whole No. 172) and the February, May, August & November 2009 (Whole Nos. 173 - 176) issues. Because of the length of service of Kitty Hawk, we have found it necessary to subdivide Part VI into parts A & B – through Viet Nam and after Viet Nam. For picture credits, see Endnotes.^{1]} **

**To find other articles in this series, use Whole numbers above and search in Past Issues on the New Jersey Postal History Journal page.*

Tenth Deployment

Kitty Hawk was deployed again to the western Pacific from November 23, 1973 to July 9, 1974. This was the only time she did not operate off Vietnam during the war.



Fig. 155: A rubber-stamped cacheted cover which was postmarked during her first foray into the Indian Ocean as part of the Seventh Fleet on March 13, 1974. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 2 (n+) (USS, CVA)) and was franked with a 10¢ American flag stamp. The cover is addressed to a long-time collector the late, Laurence J. Briend, who, with the author, was co-founder of USS America Chapter 71, Universal Ship Cancellation Society when we were teenagers. The cancel is listed as "A" in the Postmark Catalog.

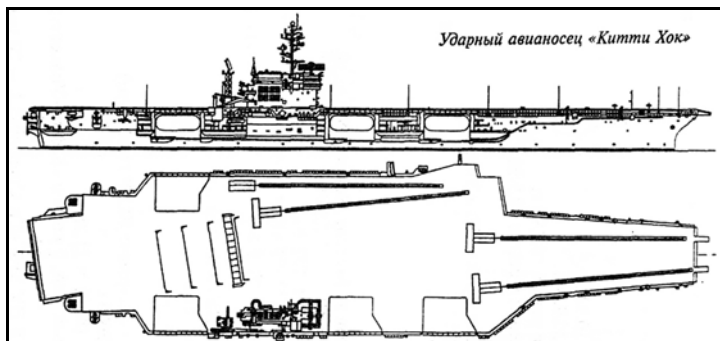


Fig. 156: Identification diagram of USS Kitty Hawk, from a Russian manual in the 1970s

Eleventh Deployment

A month prior to *Kitty Hawk's* next western Pacific deployment on May 21, 1975, *Midway*, *Coral Sea*, *Hancock*, *USS Enterprise* (CVAN-65), and *USS Okinawa* (LPH-3) responded on April 19, 1975 when North Vietnam overran two-thirds of South Vietnam. Ten days later, *Operation Frequent Wind* was carried out by U.S. Seventh Fleet forces. Hundreds of U.S. personnel and Vietnamese were evacuated to waiting ships after the fall of Saigon. *Kitty Hawk* returned with Carrier Air Wing Eleven (henceforth CVW Eleven) to her home port on December 15, 1975.

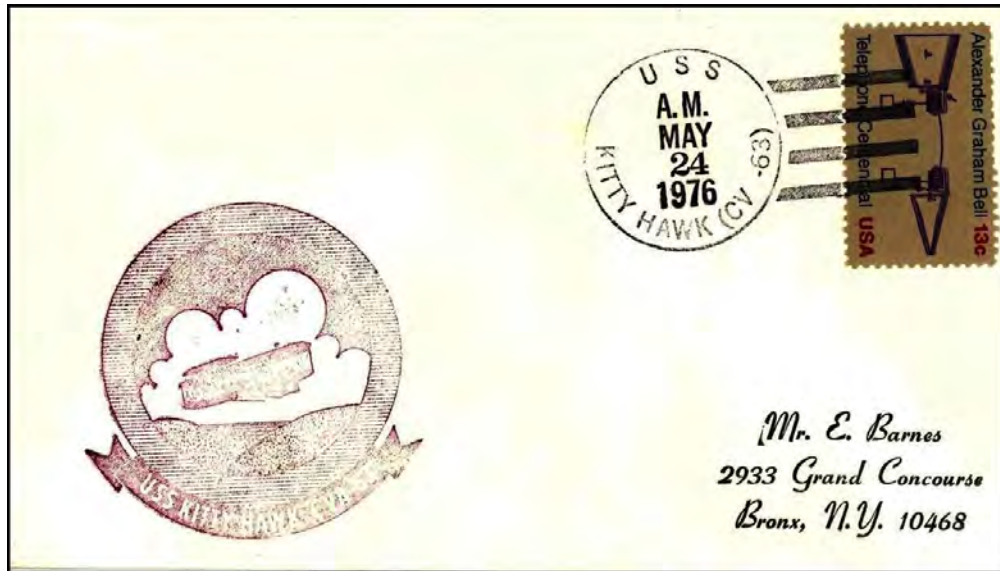


Fig. 157: A rubber-stamped cacheted cover which was postmarked on May 24, 1976. It bears *Kitty Hawk's* rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 2P [2(n+)] (USS, CV with “A” removed]) and was franked with a 13¢ Alexander Graham Bell Telephone Centennial commemorative stamp. The cancel is listed as “A” in the Postmark Catalog.



Fig. 158: *USS Kitty Hawk* underway in July 1977. N.B. This photograph is strikingly similar to the view used in the *Byrd Chapter's Decommissioning Ceremony* cover prepared by John Lyding. See Figure 186.

US Navy View by A. Legare - Defense Visual Information Center View DN-SC-86-00162

Twelfth Deployment

Between October 25, 1977 and May 15, 1978 *Kitty Hawk* with CVW Eleven deployed to the western Pacific.

TO THE INDIAN OCEAN AND BEYOND (1979-1987)

Thirteenth Deployment

On May 30, 1979, *Kitty Hawk* and CVW Fifteen departed San Diego on their last seven-month cruise to the western Pacific together. On October 28, 1979, *Kitty Hawk* and her escorts were directed to operate south of the Korean peninsula in response to the assassination of South Korean President Park Chung Hee on October 26, 1979.

The Iranian Hostage Crisis

On November 18, 1979, *Midway* arrived in the northern part of the Arabian Sea in connection with the hostage crisis in Iran. Followers of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who had come to power following the overthrow of the Shah, seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on November 4 and held 63 U.S. hostages. Spokesmen demanded that the United States return to Iran the deposed Shah who was in a New York hospital. *Kitty Hawk's* cruise was extended two and a half months to support contingency operations in the North Arabian Sea. On November 21, 1979, *Kitty Hawk* and her escorts were directed to sail to the Indian Ocean to join *Midway* in the northern Arabian Sea. *Kitty Hawk* arrived on station on December 3. This was the first time since World War II that the U.S. Navy had two carrier task forces in the Indian Ocean in response to a crisis.



Fig. 159: Moving Mk-82 500-pound bombs past two parked A-6 Intruder attack aircraft.

US Navy photo by ENS A. Legare
(DVIC id: DN-SN-85-11093).



Fig.160: Crewmen in flight control center use a table to simulate aircraft layout on flight deck, Dec. 1979.

US Navy photo by PHC Ken George
(DVIC id: DN-SN-85-06358).

Two weeks later, on December 21, 1979, the Defense Department announced a three-ship nuclear-powered carrier battle group from the Sixth Fleet would deploy to the Indian Ocean to relieve the Seventh Fleet carrier battle group led by *Kitty Hawk*. The Sixth Fleet carrier battle group consisted of USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68)² and her nuclear-powered cruiser escorts, USS *California* (CGN-36) and USS *Virginia* (CGN-38). However, on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1979, the Soviets airlifted 5,000 airborne troops and equipment into the Afghanistan capital of Kabul. The U.S. protested the invasion but the Soviet Union claimed they were there at the request of the Afghanistan government. On December 27, a Soviet-backed coup installed a new president in Afghanistan. Two carrier task forces centered on *Kitty Hawk* and *Midway* continued contingency operations in the northern Arabian Sea.



Fig. 161: A rubber-stamped cacheted cover with rubber stamp return address which was postmarked during her 1980 excursion into the Indian Ocean as part of the Seventh Fleet with USS *Midway* (CV-41) on January 22, 1980 during the Iranian Hostage Crisis. It bears *Kitty Hawk*'s rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type P [2 (n+) (USS, CV with "A" removed)]) and was franked with a 15¢ definitive American flag stamp. The author was on board USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68) this day when she rendezvoused with *Kitty Hawk* and *Midway*. *Kitty Hawk* transferred to *Nimitz* the helicopters which subsequently were launched in April 1980 in the failed hostage rescue attempt (see below). The cancel is listed as "A" in the Postmark Catalog.

The *Nimitz* battle group joined the *Kitty Hawk* and *Midway* groups on Gonzo Station (Gulf of Oman Naval Zone of Operations) in the Arabian Sea on January 22, 1980. *Nimitz* received from *Kitty Hawk* eight RH53s from HMM- HM-16, Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron Sixteen -- which ultimately would be launched on April 24, 1980 to Desert One during the failed Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission. The following day, *Kitty Hawk* departed for the Naval Air Station at Subic Bay in the Philippines, having spent 64 days in operations connected with the Iranian crisis. *Kitty Hawk* and CVW Fifteen returned to San Diego on February 25, 1980.

Fourteenth Deployment

In April 1, 1981, *Kitty Hawk* and CVW Fifteen left San Diego for the western Pacific and Indian Oceans. Following an eight-month cruise, *Kitty Hawk* returned on November 23, 1981. The crew was awarded the Navy Expeditionary Medal and the Humanitarian Service Medal for rescuing Vietnamese refugees in the South China Sea. In January 1982, *Kitty Hawk* returned to Bremerton, Washington for another year-long overhaul which was completed in January 1983.

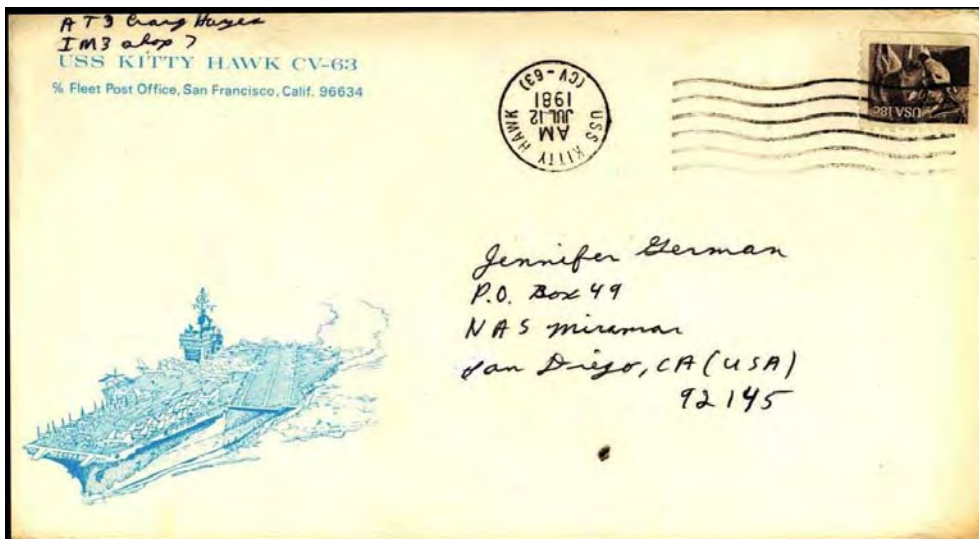


Fig. 162: A printed cacheted cover which was postmarked on July 12, 1981. It bears Kitty Hawk’s machine stamp steel cancel (Locy Type 7qt(n+u) (USS, CV) inverted) and was franked with an 18¢ stamp. The cover was sent by a petty officer in the Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Department (AIMD) and addressed to a woman at Naval Air Station Miramar, California. NAS Miramar then was the home of the West Coast fighter squadrons immortalized in the mid-1980s movie “Top Gun.” Currently, it is a Marine Corps Air Station. The cancel is listed as “A” in the Postmark Catalog.

Fifteenth Deployment



Fig. 163: 1984 WESTPAC formation, with USS Long Beach (CGN-9) leading the Kitty Hawk battle group.³

Following work-ups with CVW Nine, *Kitty Hawk* deployed as the flagship for Battle Group Bravo on January 13, 1984. She returned to San Diego seven and a half months later on August 1, 1984 after a deployment to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. During exercise *Team Spirit '84* she was struck by a submerged *Victor*-class Soviet submarine in the Sea of Japan, forcing the submarine to be towed back to her homeport. *Kitty Hawk* logged over 62,000 miles on this deployment and remained on station in the North Arabian Sea for more than 60 consecutive days, returning to San Diego on August 1, 1984.

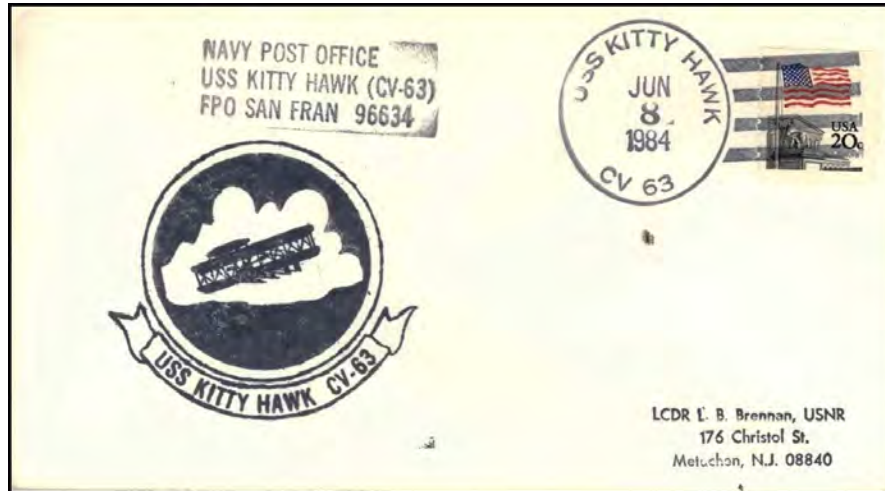


Fig. 164: A rubber-stamped cacheted cover with rubber stamp return address which was postmarked on June 8, 1984. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 2t(nu) (USS, CV)) and was franked with a 20¢ definitive American flag stamp. The cancel is listed as "A" in the Postmark Catalog.

Sixteenth Deployment



Fig. 165: A Xerox-printed cacheted cover which was postmarked on the 75th anniversary of Naval Aviation, January 18, 1986. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 2-1(n+) (USN, USS, CV)) and was franked with a 22¢ John J. Audubon definitive stamp. The cover was sponsored by Jan Eyerman of USS New Jersey Chapter USCS who learned the art of making Xerox-printed cacheted covers converted from a sheet of paper from his father. The cancel is listed as "A" in the Postmark Catalog.

On July 24, 1985, *Kitty Hawk* again deployed as flagship for Battle Group Bravo, responding to tasking from the California coast to the Gulf of Aden. *Kitty Hawk* and CVW Nine returned to the West Coast on December 21, 1985. *Kitty Hawk* celebrated 25 years of service in 1986, and a month later, the Navy celebrated 75 years of naval aviation on January 18, 1986.

Seventeenth Deployment: Return to the East Coast 1987-1991

Kitty Hawk began 1987 with a farewell to San Diego. On January 3, the ship and CVW Nine departed her homeport of 25 years and set out on a six-month world cruise. *Kitty Hawk* spent 106 consecutive days on station in the Indian Ocean and was again awarded the Navy Expeditionary Medal and the Meritorious Unit Citation.

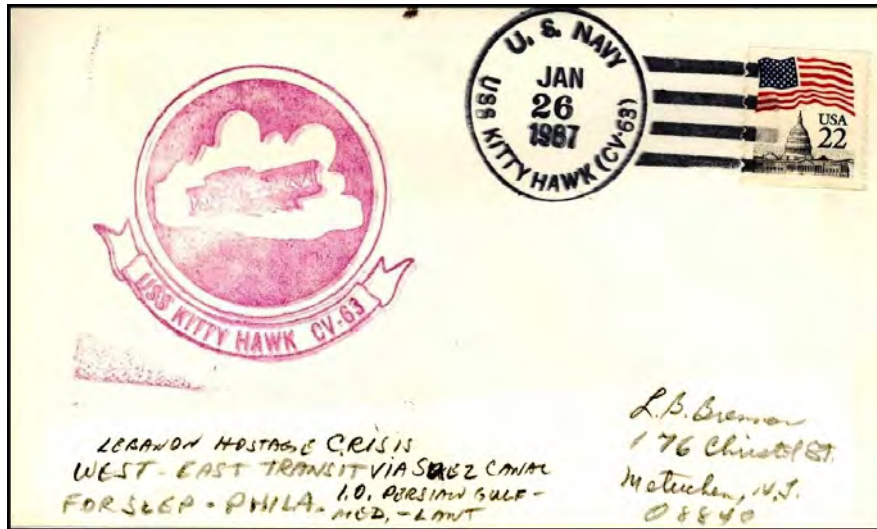


Fig. 166: A rubber-stamped cacheted cover which was postmarked during the ship’s return to the East Coast for an extensive yard period on January 26, 1987. It bears Kitty Hawk’s rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 2-1(n+) (USN, USS, CV)) and was franked with a 22¢ flag definitive stamp. The cover was sponsored by Laurence J. Briend. The cancel is listed as “A” in the Postmark Catalog.



Fig. 167: Battle group formation underway in the Pacific Ocean, 2 March 1987. The ships are, left to right, front row: frigate USS Barbey (FF-1088), guided missile cruiser USS Halsey (CG-23), frigate USS Stein (FF-1065); second row, guided missile frigate USS Vandegrift (FFG-48), combat stores ship USS Mars (AFS-1), Kitty Hawk, ammunition ship USS Mount Hood (AE-29) and the guided missile destroyer USS Callaghan (DDG-994). Defense Visual Information Center, photo id.: DN-SC-87-10339

The cruise ended at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard on July 3, 1987.

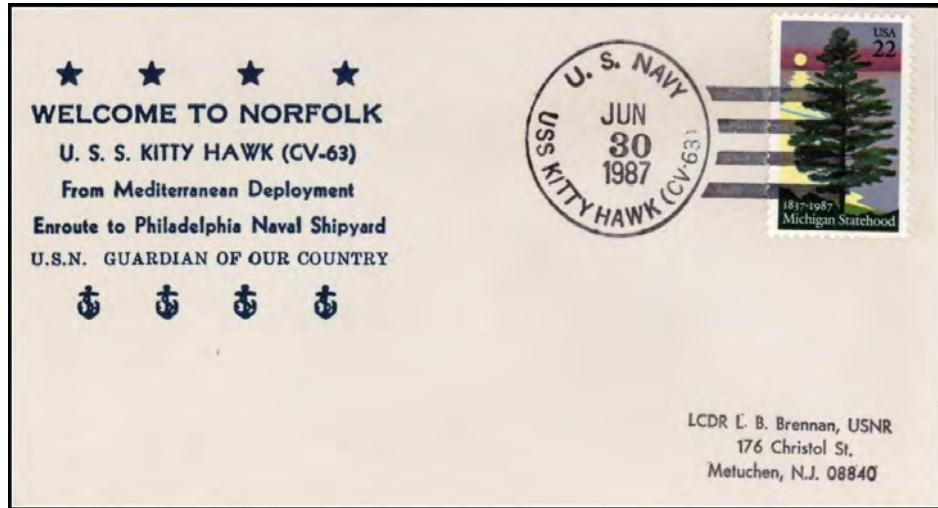


Fig. 168: A Tazewell G. Nicholson, “Welcome to Norfolk” printed cacheted cover which was postmarked on June 30, 1987 during the ship’s return to the East Coast for an extensive yard period. It bears Kitty Hawk’s rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 2-1(n+) (USN, USS, CV)) and was franked with a 22¢ Michigan Statehood commemorative stamp. The cancel is listed as “A” in the Postmark Catalog.

Six months later, *Kitty Hawk* began a Service Life Extension Program (SLEP) overhaul. *Kitty Hawk* emerged from the yards nearly four years later, on March 29, 1991, her deck modified to accommodate the F/A-18 *Hornet*. The overhaul was estimated to have added 20 years to her service life. *Kitty Hawk* departed for the West Coast on July 30, 1991. *Kitty Hawk* did not participate in the first Gulf War.



Fig. 169: A printed cacheted cover which was postmarked for the ship’s 30th anniversary in commission following an extensive yard period on April 29, 1991. It bears Kitty Hawk’s rubber stamp hand cancels (Locy Type F (K-20c) and Type 9-1 (n+u) (K-20b)) and was franked with an undenominated interim “F” domestic first class stamp. The cancels are both listed as “B” in the Postmark Catalog.

Eighteenth Deployment: Return to the Pacific Fleet

With the return of CVW Fifteen, *Kitty Hawk* began its second cruise around “the Horn” of South America to her original homeport of San Diego on December 11, 1991. On August 1, 1992, *Kitty Hawk* was appointed as Commander, Naval Air Forces, Pacific's “ready carrier.”

Nineteenth Deployment

The ship embarked the Commander, Cruiser-Destroyer Group Five, Commander, Destroyer Squadron Seventeen, and CVW Fifteen for three months of work-ups before deploying to the western Pacific on November 3, 1992.

While deployed, *Kitty Hawk* spent nine days off the coast of Somalia supporting U.S. Marines and coalition forces involved in *Operation Restore Hope*. In response to increasing Iraqi violations of the United Nations sanctions, the ship was redeployed to the Arabian Gulf on December 27, 1992. Just 17 days later, on January 13, 1993, *Kitty Hawk*, with 35 of her CVW Fifteen aircraft, led a joint, coalition offensive strike against missile sites in southern Iraq.

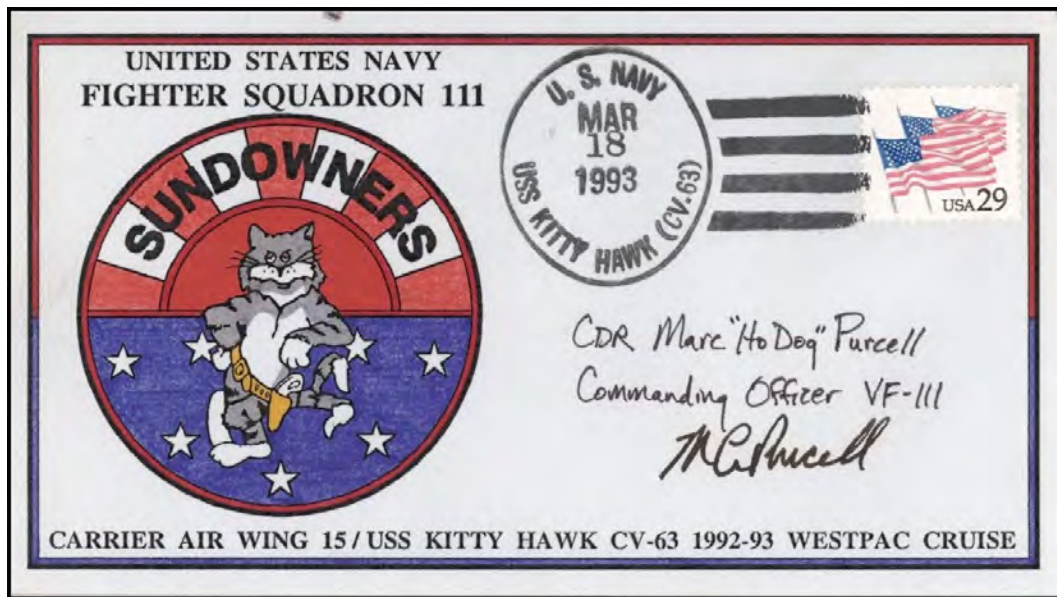


Fig. 170: A Steve Kovas “Zone Five” computer printed, hand colored, cacheted cover for Fighter Squadron One Eleven which was postmarked on March 18, 1993. It bears Kitty Hawk’s rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 2-1(n+) (USN, USS, CV)) and was franked with a 29¢ flag definitive stamp. The cover is autographed by the Commanding Officer of VF-111, Commander Marc “Ho Dog” Purcell, U.S. Navy. He was a 1971 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and retired in 2009 as a Rear Admiral. The cancel is listed as “A” in the Postmark Catalog.

Kitty Hawk's battle group was relieved by the *USS Nimitz* battle group on March 18, 1993 and headed for home, after having operated in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf and participated in *Operations Restore Hope* and *Southern Watch*. She arrived in San Diego on May 3, 1993.

Twentieth Deployment

Kitty Hawk departed San Diego on June 24, 1994 for a deployment to the western Pacific and returned on December 22, 1994.



Fig. 171: A Gary Rogak hand painted cacheted cover for the ship's 34th anniversary was postmarked on April 29, 1995. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 13-11(n+)) (USN, USS, CV) formerly Type CD-9) and was franked with the "G" interim definitive stamp. The cover also contains the ship's rubber stamp cachet in the upper left corner. The cancel is listed as "A" in the Postmark Catalog.

Twenty-First Deployment

In the early summer of 1996, *Kitty Hawk* participated in *Exercise Rim of the Pacific '96* (RIMPAC 96). She then departed San Diego on her next six-month deployment on October 11, 1996. *Kitty Hawk* and her battle group, *USS Cowpens* (CG-63), *USS Antietam* (CG-54), *USS Reid* (FFG-30), and *USS Salt Lake City* (SSN-716), deployed to the western Pacific, Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. They spent three months in the Gulf in support of *Operation Southern Watch* and UN sanctions. During that period, CVW Eleven aircraft flew 1,775 sorties, accumulating 4,065 flight hours. Battle group ships conducted Maritime Interception Operations (MIO) in which crew members boarded and searched merchant ships believed to be carrying cargo in violation of UN sanctions against Iraq. *Kitty Hawk* and her battle group returned to homeport on April 11, 1997.



Fig. 172: USS Kitty Hawk with USS Cowpens (CG-63) in the Sea of Japan.

Photo by Capt. Dallas Bethea, USN (Ret) CO, USS Cowpens 1993-1995

FORWARD DEPLOYED TO JAPAN 1998-2008

Twenty-Second Deployment

On July 18, 1998, USS *Independence* (CV-62) turned over forward-deployed duties in Yokosuka, Japan, to *Kitty Hawk* while the two aircraft carriers were in Pearl Harbor. Upon reaching Japan, *Kitty Hawk* took on a new air wing, CVW Five, which had operated as a forward-deployed unit at Atsugi Naval Air Station since 1973.



Fig.173: USS Independence (CV 62) – left, and USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63) – right, at Pearl Harbor in 1998.

Kitty Hawk arrived in her new homeport of Yokosuka, Japan, on August 11, 1998. *Kitty Hawk* became the third aircraft carrier to be permanently forward deployed to Japan, after USS *Midway* (CV-41) and *Independence* (CV-62).

Twenty-Third Deployment

Kitty Hawk participated in *Exercise Foal Eagle '98*, the largest joint/combined exercise in the world between October 24 and November 4, 1998 off the coast of Korea. On November 20, 1998, *Kitty Hawk* received the First Navy Jack designating the 37-year-old aircraft carrier as the oldest ship in the fleet⁴.

Twenty-Fourth Deployment

Kitty Hawk's next deployment began on March 2, 1999. The ship and CVW Five participated in *Exercise Tandem Thrust* with a port visit to Agana, Guam. While at Agana, *Kitty Hawk* was visited by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jay L. Johnson on April 3. The CNO delivered the news that *Kitty Hawk* was being then directed to the Arabian Gulf along with USS *Chancellorsville* (CG-62) and USS *Curtis Wilbur* (DDG-54), after President Clinton ordered the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) battle group to the Adriatic Sea to support NATO forces in Yugoslavia instead of relieving the USS *Enterprise* (CVN-65) battle group. On April 20, *Kitty Hawk*, *Curtis Wilbur*, and *Chancellorsville* transited the Strait of Hormuz, relieving the *Enterprise's* battle group in the Arabian Gulf to participate in *Operation Southern Watch*.

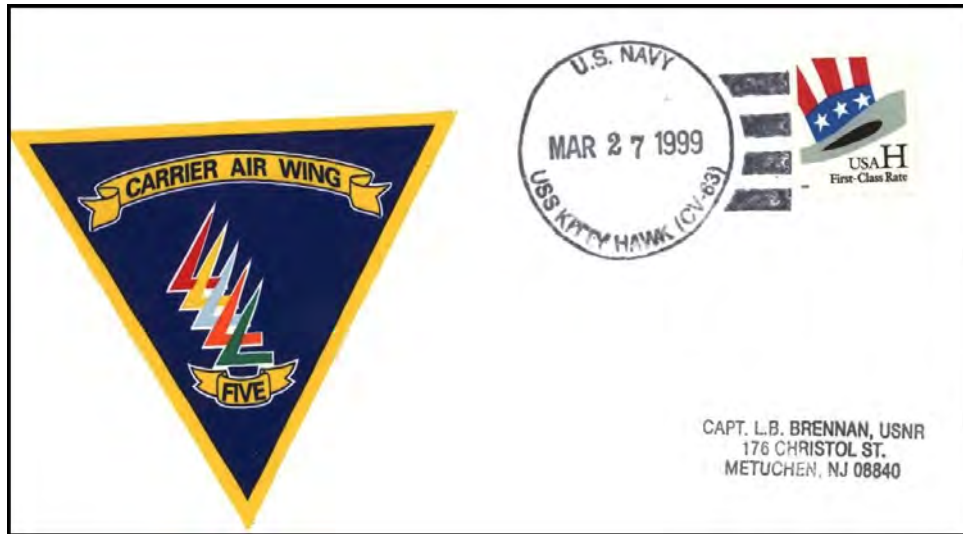


Fig. 174: A “zapper” cacheted cover for Carrier Air Wing Five (CVW 5) which was postmarked on March 27, 1999. It bears Kitty Hawk’s rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-1(n+) (USN, USS, CV)) and was franked with H intermediate definitive stamp. A zapper is a sticker, or decal, commonly used by squadrons and air wings to depict their unit insignia. The door to the author’s legal office in Nimitz was covered with the zappers of the embarked Carrier Air Wing Eight and component squadrons. The cancel is not yet listed in the Postmark Catalog.

The *Kitty Hawk* battle group was relieved by the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) battle group, and departed the Arabian Gulf on July 19, 1999, having launched more than 5,400 sorties during her three months in the Gulf.

Twenty-Fifth Deployment

Following her return to Yokosuka, she made port visits to Perth, Australia, and Pattaya, Thailand, and was back at Yokosuka in late August 1999. After participating in the multi-national *Exercises Fowl Eagle '99* and *ANNUALEX-11G* off the Korean Peninsula and Japan, *Kitty Hawk* returned to Yokosuka on November 10, 1999. Following repairs, upgrades, and training, the carrier returned to sea on February 23, 2000 for a dozen days of sea trials.

Twenty-Sixth Deployment

During her next two-month deployment to the western Pacific, *Kitty Hawk* participated in *Exercise Cobra Gold 2000* following a port call to Pattaya. *Kitty Hawk* and CVW Five again participated in the annual *Exercise Fowl Eagle* in the Sea of Japan. From November 7 to 17, 2000, the carrier trained with the Japanese Self Defense Force in *Exercise Keen Sword*; then the battle group returned to Yokosuka.

Twenty-Seventh Deployment

Following six days of sea trials in mid-February 2001, *Kitty Hawk* remained in port until March 2, 2001, when she and her battle group — USS *Chancellorsville* (CG-62), USS *Vincennes* (CG-49), USS *Gary* (FFG-51), USS *Vandegrift* (FFG-48), and USS *John S. McCain* (DDG-56) — got underway for a three-month deployment. The battle group participated in the annual *Tandem Thrust* exercise beginning on May 10, 2001.

POST 9/11 COMBAT DEPLOYMENTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Twenty-Eighth Deployment

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, *Kitty Hawk* was ordered to sea in support of *Operation Enduring Freedom*, getting underway on October 1 after an accelerated sea trials and carrier qualifications period. The ship transited more than 6,000 miles in 12 days, and reported on station in the North Arabian Sea, serving as an afloat forward staging base for U.S. joint forces. While on station, pilots from CVW Five flew more than 600 missions over Afghanistan.

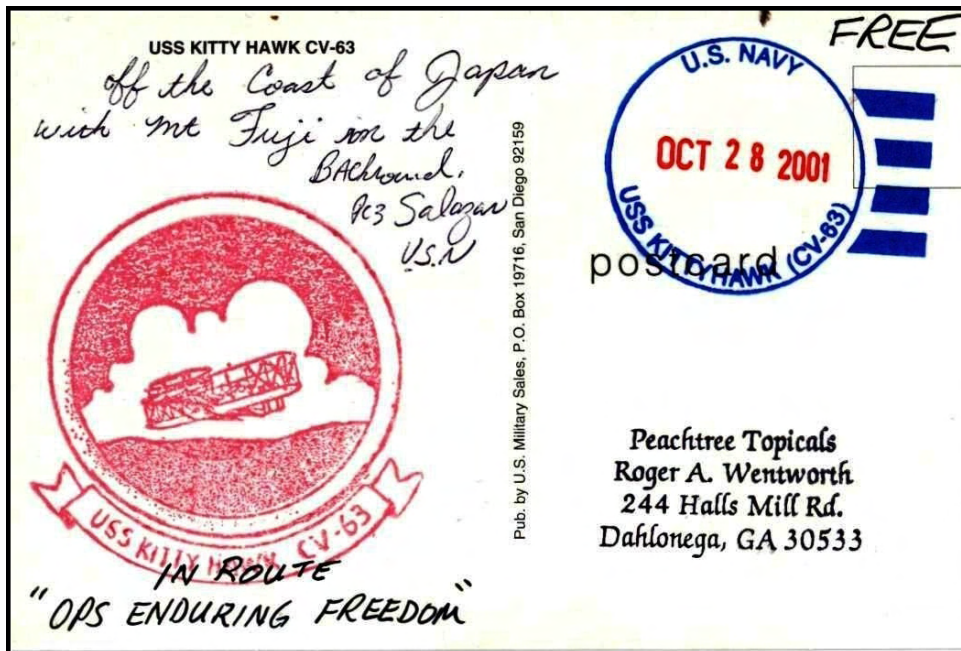


Fig. 175: A rubber stamp cacheted cover during *Operation Enduring Freedom* immediately after 9/11 which was postmarked on October 28, 2001. It bears a two color impression of *Kitty Hawk*'s rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-1(n+)) (USN, USS, CV) and was a free frank from the postal clerk to Roger A. Wentworth of Peachtree Topicals. Mr. Wentworth is a cachet artist best known for his mermaid themes and Teddy Roosevelt cachets and a member of the Universal Ship Cancellation Society. The cancel is not yet listed in the Postmark Catalog.

The beginning of December brought a close to *Kitty Hawk*'s missions in the North Arabian Sea. After 74 consecutive days at sea, the crew made a port visit to Phuket, Thailand, on December 13-15, 2001. They then continued on to Yokosuka, arriving on December 23, 2001, after 83 days at sea.

Twenty-Ninth Deployment

Following an intensive Ship's Restricted Availability (SRA) period, *Kitty Hawk* departed Yokosuka on March 12, 2002 to begin sea trials. *Kitty Hawk* stood out to sea again on March 18, to complete carrier qualifications (CQ) and integrated battle-group training near Guam, returning to Yokosuka on April 1. The carrier departed Yokosuka again about three weeks later for another period of underway training.



Fig. 176: A rubber stamp cacheted cover marking the 60th anniversary of the Doolittle Raid on Japan which was postmarked on April 18, 2002. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-1(n+)) (USN, USS, CV) and 34¢ Statue of Liberty definitive stamp. The rubber stamp cachet is a modified copy of the printed cachet first sponsored by USS America Chapter 71 USCS for the 35th anniversary of the Doolittle Raid in 1977. The cancel is not yet listed in the Postmark Catalog.

Battle group ships participating in this training included USS *Chancellorsville* (CG-62), USS *O'Brien* (DD-975), USS *Vandergrift* (FFG-48), USS *Cowpens* (CG-63), USS *Curtis Wilbur* (DDG-54), USS *John S. McCain* (DDG-56), and USS *Cushing* (DD-985). USS *Helena* (SSN-725), USNS *Rappahannock* (T-AO-204), USNS *Kiska* (T-AE-35), and USNS *Concord* (T-AFS-5) supported the training operations.

Subsequently, *Kitty Hawk* made port visits to Hong Kong, Singapore and Guam. The ship celebrated her 41st birthday just prior to pulling into Hong Kong. She returned to Yokosuka on June 5.

Thirtieth Deployment

Kitty Hawk left Yokosuka on October 25, 2002, for a scheduled underway period in the western Pacific. While at sea, the ship's crew, along with the embarked CVW Five and Destroyer Squadron 15 engaged in combined military exercises. The carrier returned to Yokosuka on December 13, 2002.

Thirty-First Deployment

Kitty Hawk got underway on January 23, 2003. The deployment turned out not to be routine for on February 12 the ship was directed to the Arabian Gulf to deal with Iraq. The carrier and CVW Five, arriving on February 22, spent more than 100 consecutive days underway in support of *Operations Southern Watch* and *Iraqi Freedom*. The *Kitty Hawk* Strike group consisted of *O'Brien*, *Cowpens*, *Curtis Wilbur*, *John S. McCain*, and *Cushing*. *Rappahannock* and *Flint* provided logistical support.

During *Kitty Hawk's* participation in *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, CVW Five flew 5,375 sorties during 11,800 flight hours, and expended 864,860 pounds of ordnance. The *Kitty Hawk* Strike Group departed the Gulf on April 16 and returned to Yokosuka on May 6, 2003.



Fig. 177: A printed cacheted cover sponsored by Decatur Chapter 4 USCS for the Centennial of Flight which was postmarked on December 17, 2003. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type F) and was franked with a 37¢ First Flight stamp. The cancel is not listed in the Postmark Catalog.

Thirty-Second Deployment

Fig. 178: A printed cacheted cover for the ship's joint operations with the Republic of Korea which was postmarked on March 27, 2004. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-2an) (USS, CV) FPO AP 96634-2770, with killer bars and was franked with 37¢ definitive stamp. The cover was sponsored by Jim Woodley a former member of the Universal Ship Cancellation Society. The cancel is not yet listed in the Postmark Catalog.



Fig. 179: An F/A-18F Super Hornet assigned to the "Diamondbacks" of Strike Fighter Squadron One Zero Two (VFA-102), launching from one of four steam powered catapults aboard USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63). The Super Hornet replaced "Tomcats" (F14A) in CVW Five.

U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 3rd Class Jason T. Poplin (# 040228-N-5821P-010).

Between February 18 and May 24, 2004, *Kitty Hawk* deployed to the western Pacific and South Pacific. On February 19, 2004 *Kitty Hawk* had her first landing of an F/A-18F Super Hornet. The VFA-102 "Diamondbacks" introduced the improved F/A-18 E/F "Super Hornet" to the Seventh Fleet, replacing the F-14 Tomcat after more than 30 years of service.

Thirty-Third Deployment

On July 3, 2005, *Kitty Hawk* called at Sydney, Australia. During the same cruise, the *Kitty Hawk* made a port call in Guam. She returned to Yokosuka on August 20, 2005.

Thirty-Fourth Deployment

In November 2005, *Kitty Hawk* anchored at Hong Kong, and was there for Thanksgiving. In June 2006, after a six month SRA period, the *Kitty Hawk* once again got underway, was overflown by a Russian Il-38, and shortly after pulled into Otaru, on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaidō, and Singapore. In August 2006 the carrier pulled into Fremantle, Australia for shore leave. In September 2006, *Kitty Hawk* made the final port call of the deployment at Pattaya, after which she returned to Yokosuka.

Thirty-Fifth Deployment

The ship departed Yokosuka on June 8, 2006. During the 99-day deployment, she took part in *Exercise Valiant Shield*, a multi-service war game involving three carrier strike groups, 22,000 personnel, and 280 aircraft June 19 to 23. It was the largest military exercise conducted by the United States in Pacific waters since the Vietnam War.

Kitty Hawk and her escorts were conducting exercises near Okinawa when a People's Liberation Army Navy's *Song*-class submarine shadowed the group then surfaced within five miles of the group on October 26, 2006. It was rare for Chinese subs to operate that far from their homeports on the mainland. Reports claim that the submarine had been undetected until it surfaced. In 2009, Admiral Timothy J. Keating, Commander, United States Pacific Command, stated that the carrier was "in a very relaxed posture. If there were some heightened state of tension, believe me, we would not let them get that close."

On January 11, 2007 *Kitty Hawk* entered a scheduled period of maintenance in Yokosuka, her place being taken by the *Ronald Reagan* which made an unscheduled deployment three weeks later.

Thirty-Sixth Deployment

This deployment began in May 2007. On July 5, 2007, *Kitty Hawk* pulled into Sydney for six days after participating in *Exercise Talisman Sabre*. On September 21, 2007, *Kitty Hawk* returned to Yokosuka after a four-month summer deployment.

Thirty-Seventh Deployment

In November 2007, *Kitty Hawk* and other US ships performed a joint military exercise, in the Bay of Bengal. Other nations that took part in this exercise were Australia, India, Japan and Singapore. Later that month, *Kitty Hawk* was scheduled to dock at Hong Kong for Thanksgiving but China denied entry. China then reversed its position "on humanitarian grounds." By that time *Kitty Hawk* was too far away to anchor in time for the holiday. The cause of the Chinese refusal remains unclear.

Thirty-Eighth Deployment

Kitty Hawk was deployed off the coast of China along with two other ships during the Taiwan election on March 20, 2008. After the elections, she entered Hong Kong for the last time.

RELIEF BY USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN-73) AND RETURN TO THE WEST COAST FOR DECOMMISSIONING



Fig. 180A & B: Last aircraft to catapult from USS Kitty Hawk, a Super Hornet, on August 6, 2008, in the Pacific Ocean, just before her return to San Diego. Kitty Hawk departed Japan on May 28, and was replaced by the nuclear-powered USS George Washington. US Navy photos by Chief Mass Communication Specialist Don Bray (#080806-N-9076B-014).

For a decade, *Kitty Hawk* was the forward-deployed carrier at Yokosuka Naval Base. She departed Japan on May 28, 2008 and arrived at San Diego on August 7, 2008, months after her scheduled return to the United States, delayed by a serious fire on board *USS George Washington*. In October 2008 she was replaced by *George Washington*; *Kitty Hawk* then returned to the United States for her decommissioning ceremony on January 31, 2009. She was officially decommissioned on May 12, 2009 after almost 49 years of service. *Kitty Hawk* was replaced by the *USS George H. W. Bush* (CVN-77) as the 11th active carrier in the fleet.

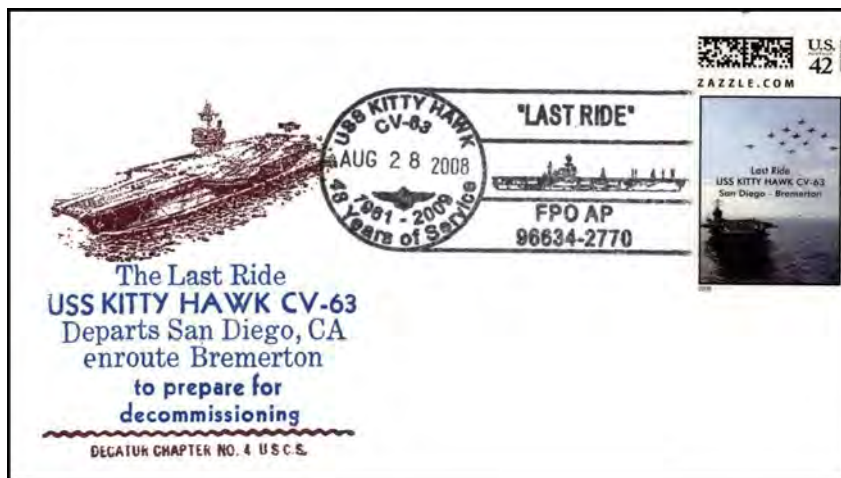


Fig. 181: A printed cacheted cover sponsored by Decatur Chapter 4 USCS for the ship's final voyage from San Diego to Bremerton which was postmarked on August 28, 2008. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type F) and was franked with a 42¢ Zazzle stamp showing the ship and air wing in flight. The cancel is not listed in the Postmark Catalog.



Fig. 182: A printed cacheted cover sponsored by Decatur Chapter 4 USCS for the ship's arrival at Bremerton for decommissioning which was postmarked on September 2, 2008. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type F) and was franked with a 42¢ Zazzle stamp showing the ship. The cancel is not listed in the Postmark Catalog.

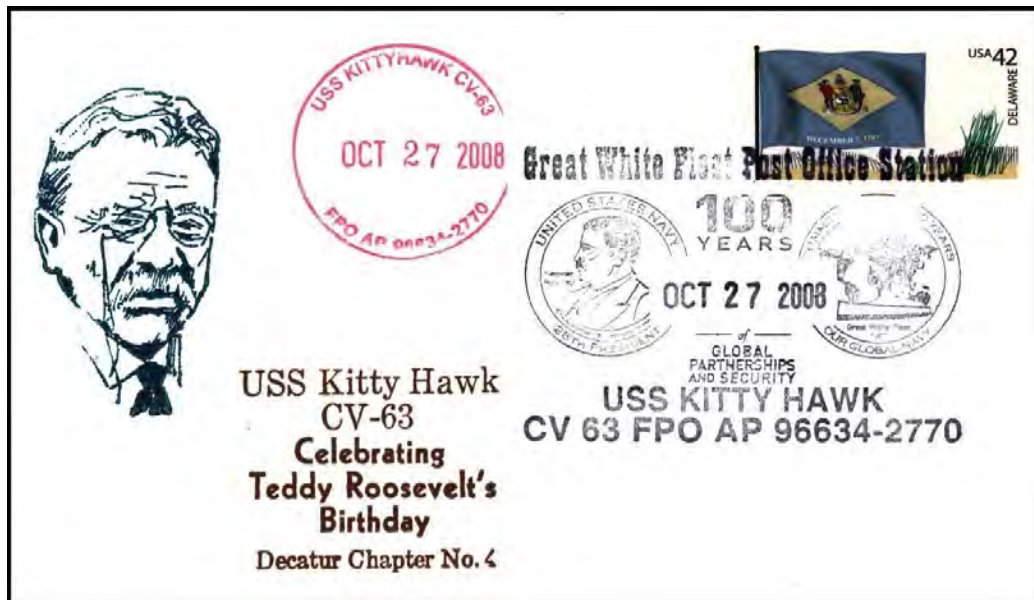


Fig. 183: A printed cacheted cover sponsored by Decatur Chapter 4 USCS for 150th birthday of Theodore Roosevelt, the father of the modern American Navy, which was postmarked on October 27, 2008, traditionally Navy Day. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-2an+(USS, FPO AP 96634-2770) no killer bars and Locy Type CD-10 Great White Fleet) and was franked with a 42¢ Delaware State commemorative stamp. The cancels are not listed in the Postmark Catalog.

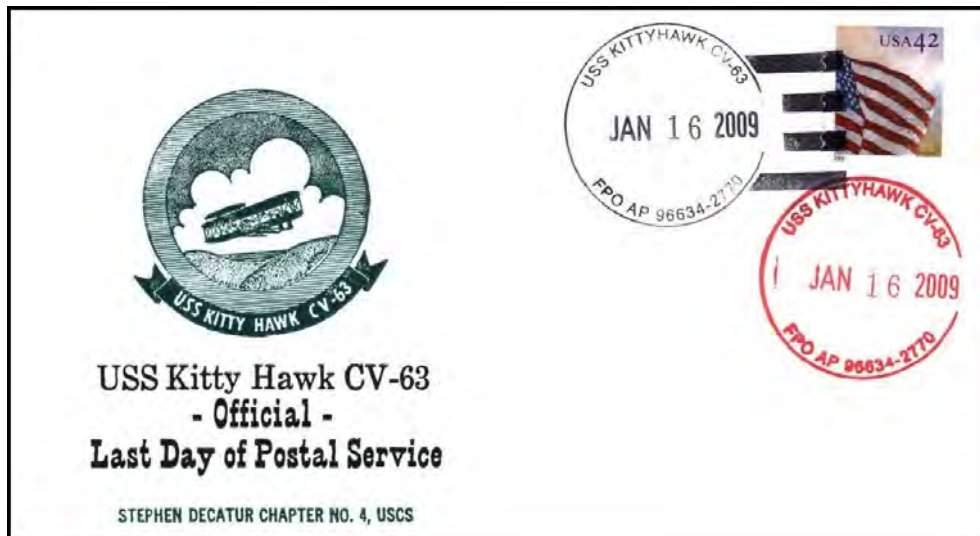


Fig. 184: A printed cacheted cover sponsored by Decatur Chapter 4 USCS for the ship's Official Last Day of Postal Service which was postmarked on January 16, 2009. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-2an+(USS, FPO AP 96634-2770) no killer bars, and Type 11-2n+ (USS, FPO AP 96634-2770 with killer bars) and Type F) and was franked with a 42¢ flag definitive stamp. The cancels are not listed in the Postmark Catalog.



Fig. 185: A printed cacheted cover sponsored by Decatur Chapter 4 USCS for the ship's Decommissioning Ceremony which was postmarked on January 31, 2009. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-2an+(USS, FPO AP 96634-2770) no killer bars, and Type 11-2n+ (USS, FPO AP 96634-2770 with killer bars) and Type F) and was franked with a 42¢ Alaska state commemorative stamp. The cancels are not listed in the Postmark Catalog.

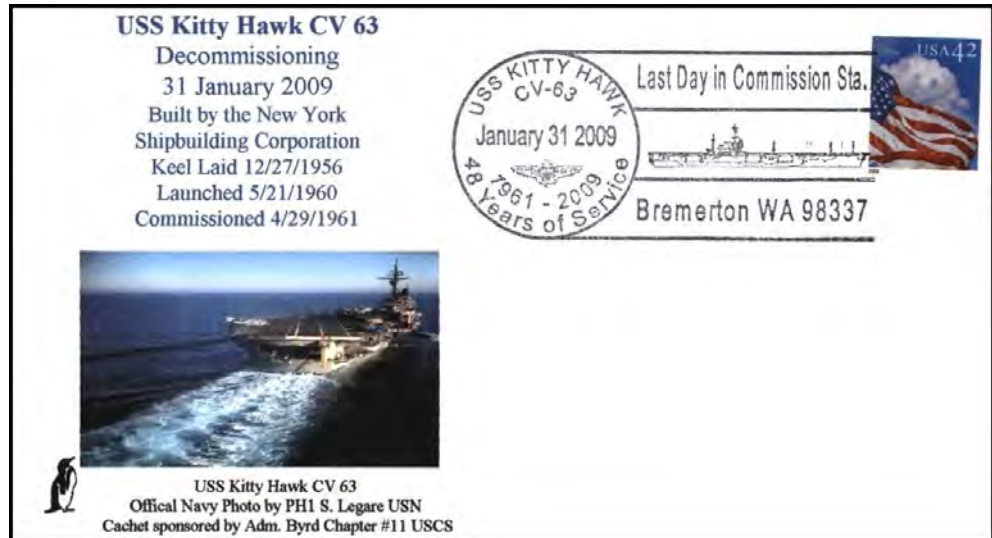


Fig. 186: A printed cacheted cover sponsored by Byrd Chapter 11, USCS for the ship's Decommissioning Ceremony which was postmarked on January 31, 2009. It bears a USPS rubber stamp hand cancel and was franked with a 42¢ definitive flag stamp. John Lyding of Byrd Chapter designed and printed the cover which shows the view enjoyed by a naval aviator on final about to trap on board Kitty Hawk. The aircraft appears to be lined up, "in the grove" and calling the ball, although the LSO and "meatball" are difficult to see on the port side aft of the flight deck. USPS pictorial cancels are not listed in the Postmark Catalog.



Fig. 187: A printed cacheted cover sponsored for the ship's actual Last Day in Commission which was postmarked on May 12, 2009. It bears Kitty Hawk's rubber stamp hand cancel (Locy Type 11-2an+(USS, FPO AP 96634-2770) no killer bars, and Type 11-2n+ (USS, FPO AP 96634-2770 with killer bars) and Type F) and was franked with a 42¢ Liberty Bell "Forever" stamp. The cancels are not listed in the Postmark Catalog. Thanks to Richard Hoffner, Vice President of the USCS and Cachet Director for Decatur Chapter for this cover.



*Fig. 188:
Presentation of
colors after
decommissioning,
May 12, 2009.*

U.S. Navy photo #
090512-N-0017S-
039.

Kitty Hawk's decommissioning ceremony took place on January 31, 2009, and she was formally decommissioned on May 12, 2009.

CONCLUSION

From the first aircraft launched from Saratoga in 1928 until the last trap on board *Kitty Hawk* in 2008, New Jersey-built fast carriers were at the forefront of naval aviation. The vast majority of the ships built at Camden were converted cruisers and many were emergency small carriers built for a limited duration during the Second World War. Saratoga and *Kitty Hawk*, the first and last, were the largest of the fast carriers built by New York Shipbuilding and by some strange coincidence, they were the first and last conventionally powered fast carriers to serve in the United States Navy. For most of the 80 years between Saratoga's commissioning in 1927 and *Kitty Hawk's* decommissioning in 2009, New Jersey-built fast carriers were at the core of naval aviation. These ships brought victory at sea in the Pacific and demonstrated the huge industrial capability of New Jersey. There probably never will be another warship, let alone aircraft carrier, built in New Jersey, but the record speaks admirably for the efforts of the citizens of the Garden State who designed and built some of the most complex systems and mobile structures in the world.

[This is the last of this series on New Jersey-Built Fast Aircraft carriers.]

ENDNOTES:

¹ These and other pictures courtesy of <http://www.navsourc.org/archives> & the Department of the Navy-Naval History and Heritage Command web pages at <http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/org11-2.htm>, in addition to some images sourced from Wikipedia Commons. All photos are in the public domain.

² The author was the Legal Officer in *USS Nimitz* at this time.

³ Picture available at http://public.fotki.com/Toddster/navy_photos-1/command_photos/kittyhawk_battle.html.

⁴ This distinction allowed her to display the First Navy Jack in place of the Union Jack flown aboard other Navy ships. The First Navy Jack, a flag consisting of 13 horizontal, alternating red and white stripes with a rattlesnake across the center, bears the motto, "Don't Tread On Me." Conceived in 1775 by Commodore Ezek Hopkins of the Continental Navy, the flag was first used as a signal among ships to engage the enemy. In 1977, the Secretary of the Navy directed the ship with the longest total period of active service to display the First Navy Jack until decommissioned or transferred to the inactive reserve. At that time, the flag shall be passed to the next ship in line with appropriate honors. *Kitty Hawk* received the flag from Independence following its decommissioning on September 30 in Bremerton, Wash. After 9/11 all commissioned U.S. Navy warships have displayed the First Navy Jack at the jack staff when moored or anchored. No jack is displayed when a warship is underway.