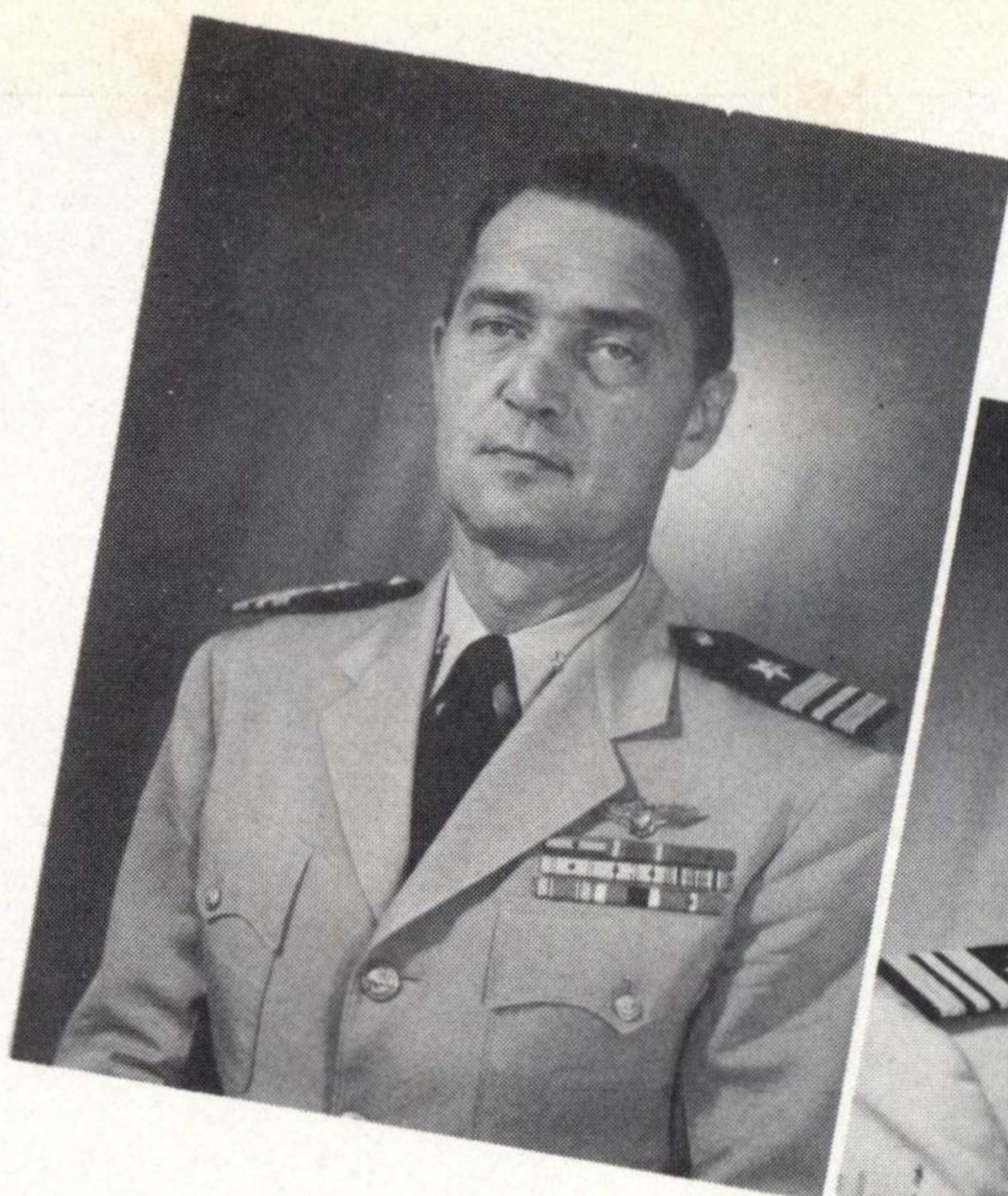


Commander Ronald W. Hoel,
USN Air Officer



Lcdr. John R. Baker, USN
Aircraft Handling Officer



Lcdr. Delloyd Stranahan, USN
Flight Deck Officer

Air Department Functions

Flight operations is a joint action by the Air Department, the air group attached to the ship and the Operations Department. The Air Department launches, lands and controls the aircraft while they are on the ship and in the near vicinity. The Operations Department takes over when the planes leave the immediate area on a mission. The air group flies and maintains the aircraft.

Handling the planes on the Flight Deck calls for the largest of the six V divisions in the Air Department. More than a hundred blue-shirted men pull the chocks for the planes prior to launching and push them into re-spot positions after landing. Activity on the Flight Deck is coordinated by the yellow-shirt plane directors and the small group in Primary Flight, a windowed room on the side of the island that functions as control tower. Repair 8, crash crew for the Deck, stands by to rush out of the Island structure and fight fire or repair damage to the Flight Deck.

V-3 has charge of the Hangar Deck, where they spot and store aircraft. They man the three aircraft elevators, the hangar bay doors and care for Hangar Bays 1 and 2. They furnish the crew that hauls planes aboard on the Port Boat Crane.

Hangar Bay 3 is V-4's territory. In World War II this Division was one of the largest on the ship and handled all the maintenance work for the squadrons' aircraft. Now, however, the squadrons perform their own maintenance. V-4 keeps aviation metal and accessories shops, the Technical Library and a parachute loft for squadron use. The Division does take care of the ship's two planes, an SNJ and an SNB, but most of their maintenance work is done on the automobiles, fork-lifts, trucks and jeeps. V-4 yeomen also staff the bustling Air Office, center of operations for the Department and Air Officer Cdr. R. W. Hoel.

The men of V-7 have charge of the aviation

fuel from the time the tanker pulls alongside the ship to transfer it aboard. They store the gasoline and Heaf and then man the thirty service stations on the Hangar and Flight Decks where the planes are fueled. Oil is brought to the aircraft in cans from stations on both decks. In between landings and launches the red-shirted crews swarm over the aircraft filling them with fuel and lubricants.

If the squadrons are scheduled for gunnery that day the aviation ordnance men bring up the bombs and rockets from storage in the lower decks, carry them from the hoists and install them in the planes. The ammunition is armed while the plane stands on the catapult ready for launching. In the case of the occasional "hot one," the hung rocket dangling from the wing of a returning aircraft or skittering down the Flight Deck ahead of an arrested plane, it is a V-6 crew that captures the missile and disarms it or sends it down a chute over the side.

V-2 combines the two gangs that start and end the flight and make aviation on a short deck possible. The catapult gang keeps four crews going steady during launches, one crew on each of the catapults and engines. The engine watch on the Sixth Deck keeps pressure on the machine. The cat is hitched to the aircraft and fired by members of the gang on the Flight Deck. In between launches they work over the apparatus to keep it in perfect condition. The Arresting Gear section operates the deck cables and barriers and sends tail-hook runners out to disengage the plane's hook from the gear after landing.

Through these six divisions the Air Department handles the carrier's striking power and the planes that make up eighty per cent of its defense. Their specialization and teamwork make the Bennington a "precision instrument of war."

