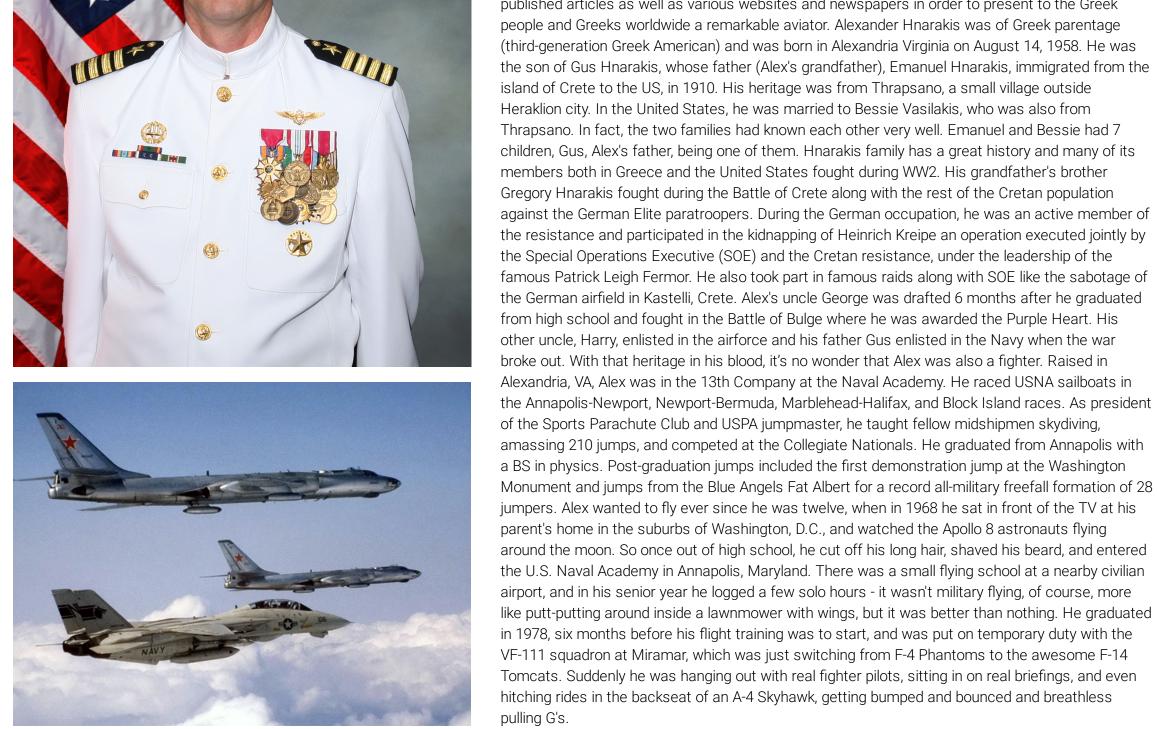
## Alexander 'Yogi' Hnarakis Home / Pilots & Crews / Fighter Pilots / Alexander 'Yogi' Hnarakis

F-14 TOMCAT & F/A-18 HORNET FIGHTER PILOT

US NAVY







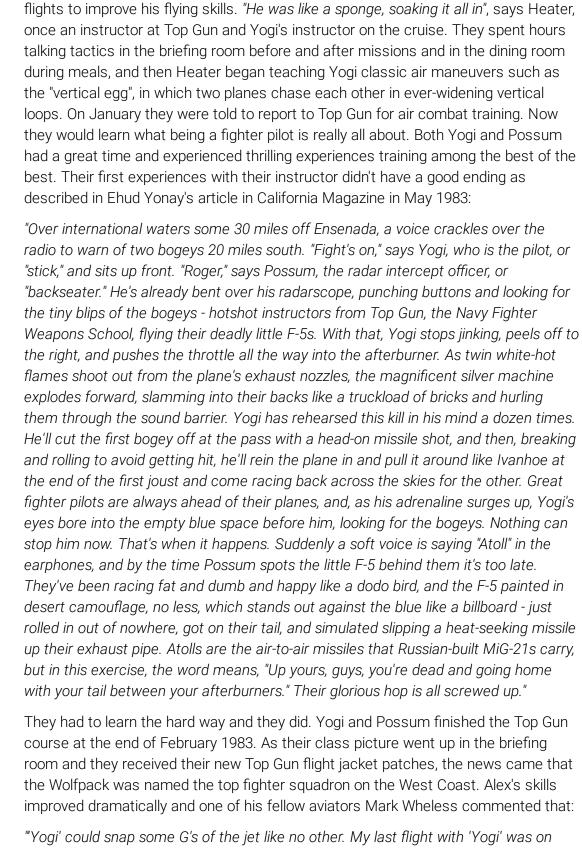






VF-124 and were assigned to their permanent squadron, the VF-1 'Wolfpack'. And on April 7, 1982, the Wolfpack took off from Miramar and landed aboard the USS Ranger, already underway 100 miles south of San Diego. It would be six months before they'd be back. But then the Ranger reached the Indian Ocean and stayed there for 101 days, and the fun was over. It finally dawned on Yogi that yanking and banking have a deadly intent. One day an order came over the carrier's speakers, and Yogi and Heater blasted off the deck like human cannonballs, their F-14s loaded to the gills with live ammo. Heading their way was a massive Russian plane that looked like a

Flying during the Top Gun courses is a tough job. Relatively new pilots must fight some of the best pilots the Navy has, and some of the best all over the world. Alexander 'Yogi' Hnarakis and David 'Possum' Cully experiences in the early courses was exactly as Jester told to Maverick in the Top Gun movie: "That was some of the best flights I've seen to date — right up to the part where you got killed. However it is better to "die" on training and learn valuable lessons about the art of dogfighting, rather than die in the field of the battle". Alex had the flight and fight abilities, but he should also master them to excellence. And that was exactly what he did learn while attending the Navy Fighters Weapons School. The painting above is a tribute from the GREEKS IN FOREIGN COCKPITS team, to the Greek American pilot, whose story, along with the Top Gun story, through the Ehud Yonay article in California Magazine in 1983, was the reason behind the making the Top Gun movie. Its shows 'Yogi' and 'Possum' during a BFM engagement with an instructor on his venerable A-4 Skyhawk, over the training ranges in California. Hi-resolution copies will be sent to his relatives as well to all those fine gentlemen who helped us understand who Alex really was. The prototype remains in Greece and



For more details regarding Top Gun and Alex, please read the whole Ehud Yonay article in California Magazine, in the excellent website of Dave 'Bio' Baranek, at the

Top Right: Over the past several years, Alex offered advice and support to the Parachute Team and he will be sorely missed. In the photo below from his USNA days, Alex is in the middle holding the red helmet, with George Argerake to his right and Mike Kennedy to his left. (USNA Parachute Team Alumni & Supporters) Middle Right: Alex as an LCDR flying with our CO in the back. The aircraft is painted in the markings of the Air Wing Commander. This photo was taken during the build-up of forces before the Desert Storm took place. Alex didn't fly operational missions in the Gulf as he was attached to General Horner HQ. (Dave Parsons) Bottom Right: Gypsy low level. Once we fenced out of Iraq, we were cleared to rage as low and fast as we wanted to as we transited Saudi Arabia en route to the Red Sea where JFK

following links: http://www.topgunbio.com/top-guns-by-ehud-yonay/ and

http://www.topgunbio.com/guest-author-yogi on top-guns/.

awaited our return. Great way to burn off adrenalin. (Dave Parsons)

Oct. 8, 1990. A Good Man."

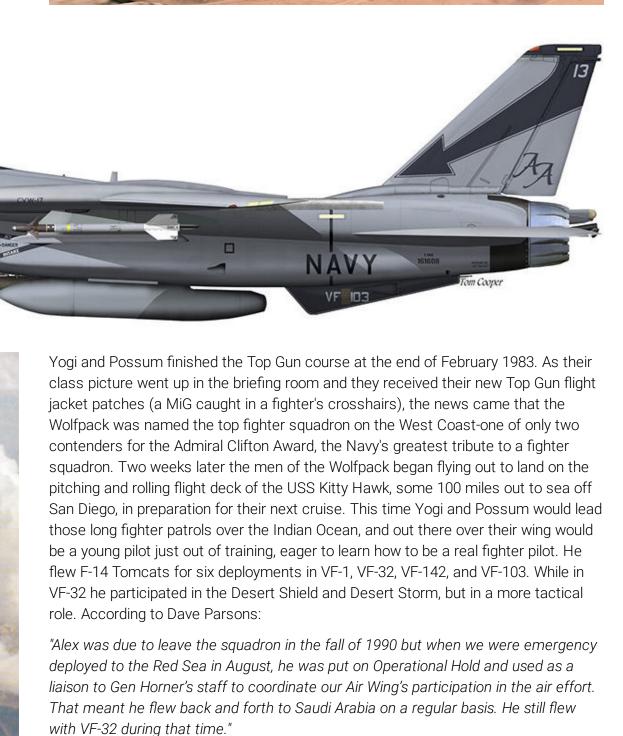
will be sent directly to his family. (Copyright George Moris)

In September 1980 he finished flight school at the top of his class and, with his new

transport but could have been anything. As they escorted the plane away, Yogi edged up so close that he could look over and see the Russians in their cockpit, staring at him and snapping photographs. He waved the way one does when someone is taking pictures, but the Russians didn't wave back - not even when Yogi's backseater took their picture. Yogi and Possum flew at least once a day off the Ranger, but most flights were ordinary patrols or exercises. There was little air combat, except when a few F-14 drivers would head out to a randomly selected "MiG alley" over the ocean and practice dogfighting. Though Yogi would dogfight with the best of them, he was almost too serious for the Wolfpack crowd, and he tried to use those long ocean

gold wings glistening on his tropical khakis, headed for the VF-124 squadron at Miramar. Yogi had flown jets in flight school - the T-2 Buckeye and A-4 Skyhawk but moving up to the F-14 Tomcat meant crossing the magic line that separates the men from the boys. By the fall of 1981 Yogi and Possum had finished their training at





After leaving the VF-32 he was posted for a brief service to the VF-43 as adversary

"Alex went from VF-32 to VF-43 in 1991. My last flight as a Gypsy was in November. Alex was in VF-43 by then and arranged for an impressive sendoff...a literal wall of

He also served the Pentagon Joint Staff, J-3, Joint Operations Division. Alex was also XO, VF-142 on George Washington (CVN-73), highlighted by hosting WWII veterans on the transatlantic crossing for the D-Day 50th anniversary. Alex was the LANTIRN

FLIR & Laser rapid prototype demonstration pilot (while he performed duties of XO for VF-103 'Sluggers'), which added precision air-to-ground strike capability to the F-

"Alex and Rat Slade (who was shot down during the Gulf War and became a POW), were the aircrew who did a proof of concept test flights in 1995. This was very unusual as typically, VX-23 at Pax River would conduct that phase of integration testing. However, there was an effort by the Hornet community to stifle any such tests so we appealed to the AIRLANT 3 Star who authorized VF-103 to modify one aircraft as the FLIRCat for testing. The testing was successful and we bypassed the normal DT/OT process and had additional LANTIRN pods available for deployment in

instructor, flying the A-4 Skyhawk. Again from Dave Parsons recollections:

bogies to greet me after Dog and I exited Dare County bombing target."

14. Dave Parson told the GIFCs:



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Above & Right: The VF-103, F-14B Tomcat, AA201 Bu.No.163224, was Alex 'Yogi' Hnarakis fighter during his time as a CO of the famous 'Jolly Rogers'. Alex took a very active role from the transition of the 'Sluggers' to 'Jolly Rogers'. The Skull and Crossbones first flew in January 1943 on the F4U Corsairs assigned to VF-17, the most lethal Navy fighter squadron of WW II. By the end of the war, the original 'Jolly Rogers' had racked up 154.5 kills over the Pacific. Noteworthy the unit's mascot is a set of skulls and crossbones enclosed in a glass encasement that supposedly are the remains of Ens Jack Ernie of VF-17. Ernie died during the Okinawa invasion in World War II while fighting against two Japanese Zeroes with his Corsair losing engine oil. Before crashing in his flaming aircraft he made two transmissions; "Skipper, I can't get out!" followed by a short pause and then, "Remember me with the Jolly Rogers!". After VF-17 had been decommissioned the Skull and Crossbones insignia was adopted by Fighter Squadron 84. After its commissioning in 1955, in an attempt to trace the history of its squadron insignia, the story of Ens. Jack Ernie was revealed to VF-84 by Jack's family and upon their suggestion and consent, Jack's skull and femurs were encased in glass and presented to the squadron, thereby fulfilling Jack's last request of remembering to the Jolly Rogers. To this day, Ens. Jack Ernie is retained on the squadron rooster and his skull and bones go with the Jolly Rogers wherever they go, serving as a symbol of courage and heroism for all Jolly Rogers to follow. According to the site HOME OF M.A.T.S. 'Passing of the bones' from the outgoing skipper to the incoming one is a time-honored 'Jolly Rogers' tradition. Following VF-84's decommissioning in October 1995, the decision was made to retire the 'Club and Cloverleaf' insignia of the VF-103 'Sluggers' and have Fighting 103 adopt the 'Jolly Roger' insignia, on Oct. 1, 1995. Prior to assuming the 'Jolly Rogers' name and insignia, VF-103, commissioned in 1952, had consistently proven ready and willing to accomplish all assigned missions while flying successively more complex and more capable aircraft. VF-103 flew numerous sorties in the moonless skies over Vietnam and achieved the only night MiG kill of the entire conflict. (Tom Cooper, USS Enterprise Cruise Book 1996, AA201 Carrier Photo by Javier Rodriguez and AA201 airfield photo by Jan Marie Hanon - further info from https://theaviationgeekclub.com and http://www.f-

During an interview aboard Enterprise, for the Defense Daily on April 27, 1996, Cmdr. Alex Hnarakis, CO of the VF-103 Tomcat squadron referred to the new capabilities of

"This will give us the capability to find and destroy targets on our own. That's a value added for the battle group. When it sets out for bombing missions, Tomcats are likely to load up with two 1,000-pound GBU laser-guided bombs or one 2,000-pound GBU. The F-14 has been certified to carry the GBU-16, GBU-10, and GBU-12, and is

expected to soon receive approval for the GBU-24. The Tomcat has four weapon stations, but typically only two are loaded with bombs. LANTIRN and the night vision goggles "significantly enhance" the ability of the Tomcat to perform forward air control missions. Four of the Tomcat crews in the squadron are qualified to perform forward

He was later posted to China Lake and became a Navy Test Pilot School graduate

personally, will always remember and admire him not only because of our common Greek heritage but for the fact that he was a complete Naval Aviator whose part of his early story immortalized in a way, through the TOP GUN film. I only regret not having the chance to speak and talk with details about our project. That's why along with the rest of the GIFCs team, Kyriakos Paloulian and George Chalkiadopoulos we took the decision and devoted the Volume C' of the GREEKS IN FOREIGN COCKPITS

series of books to him. Rest in Peace Alexander B. Hnarakis.

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CAPTA B HNARAKIS

air control missions. "Now we will be able to do it equally well at night."

14association.com)

the mighty Tomcat:

Left: With the impending retirement of the A-6 Intruder and the cancellation of the F-14 Block 1 upgrade package in 1994 due to budgetary restrictions, the Navy found itself with a need for a long-range precision platform. While the Tomcat had always had a latent bombing capability, one which had begun to be explored after Desert Storm, the aircraft was still restricted to delivering unguided bombs or laserguided bombs designated by another aircraft. It couldn't self-designate targets, a capability that was growing increasingly crucial in the wake of Desert Storm. Fortunately, Martin Marietta began exploring the feasibility of integrating the AAQ-14 LANTIRN pod, used on the F-15E Strike Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcon, to enable the Tomcat to fully enter the precision age. Martin split the two-pod LANTIRN system into one, retaining the targeting pod and adding a GPS and inertial measurement unit. This allowed the pod to calculate weapon release parameters on its own, reducing the amount of equipment that needed to be bolted to the jet. In March 1995, F-14Bs from VF-103 Sluggers were the first to drop selfdesignated laser-guided training rounds and laser-guided bombs in testing. By 1996 (after VF-103 had been renamed the Jolly Rogers) the LANTIRN was deployed on a combat cruise for the first time. In commemoration of the first LGB tests, one of VF-103's Tomcats, BuNo.161608, AA-213 was nicknamed 'FLIR Cat' receiving nose art showing the Tomcat mascot riding a laser-guided bomb while carrying a LANTIRN to signify the Tomcat's newfound ability to perform precision strikes at night. Coincidentally, the RIO assigned to the aircraft was Larry Slade, who had the misfortune of being shot down in a VF-103 Tomcat in 1991 over Iraq. Except for the profile made for this tribute by Tom Cooper, in the past, aviation artist and author, Lou Drendel immortalized the 'FlirCat' and Alex Hnarakis in one of his paintings, which we are happy to have his permission to present here. (Tom Cooper, Lou Drendel, USN, further information by David F. Brown)

A. Hnarakis





would, roll the sleeves of his flight suit up over his bicep. I don't think I ever saw anyone else do that. However, he knew how to fight the F-14 Tomcat. He could apply and maintain maximum g-forces during air combat maneuvering (ACM). He would always know his energy package and he was a master at the dynamic art of ACM. Naval Aviators are judged by how well they perform behind the boat. Again, Yogi excelled. He was always known as a safe, conservative stick behind the boat. I was very saddened to hear of Yogi's passing. We're losing far too many true warriors before their time. I understand that he fought his illness courageously even taking part in the planning of his treatment. That's just the way he lived

"I knew Alex 'Yogi' Hnarakis from my early years in the F-14 Tomcat community. He was an outstanding combination of a real gentleman and a competitive fighter pilot. Although we were never in the same squadron together, he had a good reputation around NAS Miramar, and that means a lot. Later, we served together on the Joint Staff in the Pentagon, where he

his life. Yogi was truly a great man that served this country well. He will be missed."



DAVID BARANEK



"Alex and I met in my plebe year, and he was one year further along at the Academy than I was. I did already have jumping experience from my previous life as an enlisted Marine, but I don't even remember how we met other than to say Alex and the other senior members of the jump club made me feel right at home. Alex was always careful and very thorough with his responsibilities for us, and also was very active when we communicated with military assets for the rare times we could get reserve pilots training for flight operations. Even then, it was evident Alex wanted to be in the air. I'm not sure which he wanted more: jumping or flying! We had many fun excursions with the team, and when Alex graduated and made air for his service selection, we lost touch for a few years. My last summer at Annapolis I did summer training in San Diego, and lo and behold, Alex was at Miramar training, for Top Gun



was the man who introduced our team to Alex and the reason for moving forward with this tribute, We are very honored



Left: Alex's family had a tradition of warfighting. The photo below shows the Hnarakis brothers during the WW2 era. According to Alex's cousin, Christine: "To the left is my father George in an Army uniform, in the middle is my father's brother Gus in a Navy uniform and my father's brother Harry in an Airforce uniform. Sitting directly in front of the guys is their mother Bessie. This is a really good picture. You notice Alex went into the

for helping us with this page. (Dave Baranek)



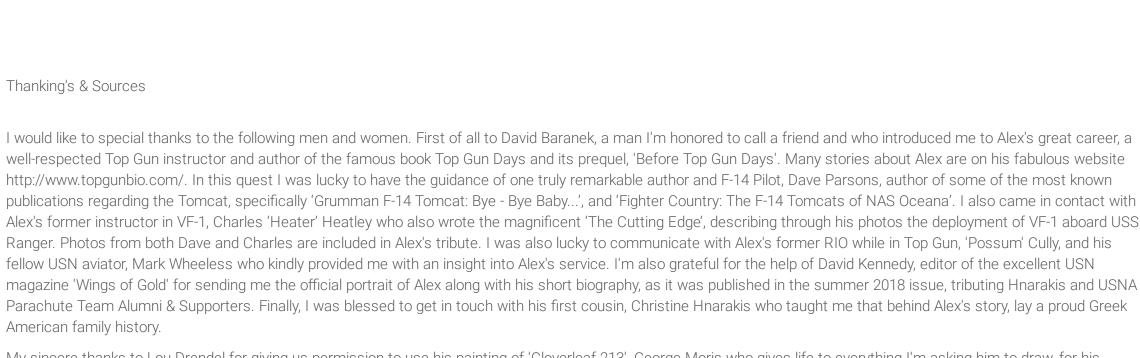
Navy just like his dad. George fought in the ETO He was a survivor of the Battle of the Bulge." (Christine Hnarakis)

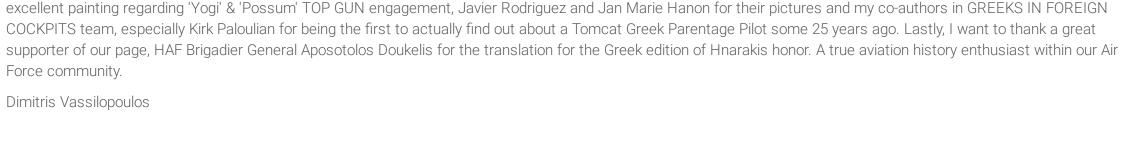
Right: A Tomcat flying in the sunset. The photo was taken by C.J. "Heater" Heatley III, and the F-14 was piloted by none other than the Greek American pilot with Cretan Parentage, Alex Hnarakis. Although the photo was taken during his first deployment it could also symbolize his last flight to the heavens...' Yogi' always liked flying and parachuting. RIP. (Charles Download PDF Version

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Alex's former instructor in VF-1, Charles 'Heater' Heatley who also wrote the magnificent 'The Cutting Edge', describing through his photos the deployment of VF-1 aboard USS Ranger. Photos from both Dave and Charles are included in Alex's tribute. I was also lucky to communicate with Alex's former RIO while in Top Gun, 'Possum' Cully, and his fellow USN aviator, Mark Wheeless who kindly provided me with an insight into Alex's service. I'm also grateful for the help of David Kennedy, editor of the excellent USN magazine 'Wings of Gold' for sending me the official portrait of Alex along with his short biography, as it was published in the summer 2018 issue, tributing Hnarakis and USNA Parachute Team Alumni & Supporters. Finally, I was blessed to get in touch with his first cousin, Christine Hnarakis who taught me that behind Alex's story, lay a proud Greek American family history. My sincere thanks to Lou Drendel for giving us permission to use his painting of 'Cloverleaf 213', George Moris who gives life to everything I'm asking him to draw, for his





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