

**weather report**

**36°**

at noon



**Today**

- Sunset, 7:24 p.m.
- Tomorrow**
- Sunrise, 6:07 a.m.
- Sunset, 7:25 p.m.

**Midday Conditions**

- Soil Temperature 52 degrees
- Humidity 69 percent
- Sky cloudy
- Winds northeast 15 mph
- Barometer 30.47 inches and steady
- Record High 87° (1964)
- Record Low 16° (1951)

**Last 24 Hours\***

- High 59°
- Low 34°
- Precipitation none

**Northwest Kansas Forecast**

Tonight: Partly cloudy, low 25, east wind 5-15 mph. Tomorrow: Partly cloudy, high 55-60, low 35, south wind 10-20 mph.

**Extended Forecast**

Wednesday: dry, high 70s. Thursday: dry, high 70s, low 40s. Friday: chance of thunderstorms, high 70, low 40s.

(National Weather Service)

Get 24-hour weather info. at 162.400 MHz. \* Readings taken at 7 a.m.

**local markets**

**Noon**

- Wheat — \$2.81 bushel
  - Posted county price — \$2.68
  - Loan deficiency payment — 0¢
  - Corn — \$1.96 bushel
  - Posted county price — \$1.84
  - Loan deficiency payment — 15¢
  - Milo — \$3.14 hundredweight
  - Soybeans — \$3.77 bushel
  - Posted county price — \$3.73
  - Loan deficiency payment — \$1.17
  - Millet — \$6.00 hundredweight
  - Sunflowers
  - Oil current crop — \$6.55 cwt.
  - Loan deficiency pmt. — \$3.08
  - Confection current — \$15/\$7 cwt.
  - Pinto beans — \$14 (new crop)
- (Markets provided by Mueller Grain, Sigco Sun, Frontier Equity Co-op and 21st Century Bean. These may not be closing figures.)

**afternoon wire**

Late news from the Associated Press

1 p.m.

**Israel retaliates with air strike**

DAHRAL-BAIDAR, Lebanon — Striking deep into Lebanon to retaliate for guerrilla attacks, Israel launched an air strike against a strategic Syrian radar station in the central mountains today — the first time Israel had targeted such a significant Syrian outpost in almost two decades. Three Syrian soldiers died and six were wounded, a Lebanese security officer said.

Syrian security forces sealed off the area in the barren mountains just north of a highway linking Beirut with Damascus, Syria's capital.

The air strike was in response to Hezbollah guerrilla attacks in recent months, an Israeli army spokesman said.

The most recent was a cross-border attack on Saturday that killed an Israeli soldier near the Chebaa Farms area.

# Crowd greets crew

## Family welcomes pilot home

By Debra Malmos

Special to the Daily News

OAK HARBOR, Wash. — They called it "Operation Valiant Return" Saturday as Lt. j.g. Jeff Vignery and the other 23 crew members of a Navy electronic surveillance plane received a hero's welcome at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.

The celebration began at 1 p.m. (2 p.m. Mountain Time) as estimated 7,000 people lined the runway at the Navy base, cheering, waving flags and yellow ribbons, and generally proud to be Americans. People laughed and talked in what seemed to be a sense of joy and pride to welcome home the "Whidbey 24" and share a moment in history.

The 24 crew members of the EP-3E electronics plane touched down in a C-9A Skytrain aircraft from Logistics Support Squadron 61 (VR-61) at 3:58 p.m. Pacific Time, about 30 minutes earlier than anticipated. Strong tail winds got credit for the early arrival, but it could have as easily been the many prayers for their return that sped the crew's journey home.

Vignery was reunited with his wife Julie and parents, Ron and Judi Vignery of Goodland, on the runway ramp about 4:20 p.m. Each crew member stepped from the plane with beaming smiles and waves to the cheering crowd. Family and close friends were given the privilege of front row greetings. Supervising Navy officers banished many reporters to the sidelines so crew members could share their first moments of joy with loved ones. Following a brief reception line greeting by dignitaries, the crew was allowed time with families immediately after deplaning.

Finally, the crew of 24 entered a hanger overflowing with the cheering crowd. Lt. Vignery was greeted by name along with each of his fellow crew members. They proceeded down a red carpet lined with Navy men at attention in full dress uniform. After the ceremony, Jeff was later quoted as saying, "I've never been so proud to be an American in my entire life."

Rear Adm. M.L. Holmes, commander of Navy Patrol and Reconnaissance Force Pacific, praised the crew, referring to himself as their "boss."

"Lt. Shane Osborn took the best possible action to save the lives of the crew," he said. Drawing cheers from the crowd, Holmes also announced that Electronic Countermeasures Squadron One (VQ-1) had won this year's Pacific Fleet "Battle E" award.

Lt. Osborn said that the Chinese F-8 fighter's nose struck the nose of the patrol plane and the jet fell out of control to the sea.

"My initial reaction was this guy just killed us," he said.

The Navy plane fell between 7,000 and 8,000 feet before they were able to regain control, he said. A major concern of the crew was whether anyone knew what had happened and where they were. He said they upheld the honor of the United States and postponed any remarks or apologies until they were aware of the position taken by U.S. government.

During brief remarks, Lt. Osborn, from Norfolk, Neb., thanked God.

"Because it was definitely Him flying that plane," the pilot said.

Osborn then thanked his crew, all the families who had traveled to the base and those responsible for the quick return of the servicemen and women.

"It does confirm what we all believe, that the spirit is still strong in the United States of America," Osborn added before leaving the stage to wild cheers from the audience.

Operation Valiant Return received extensive news coverage, which included ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX local and national news teams, as well as reporters for USA Today, Larry King Live, the Washington Post, Newsweek, the New York Times, The Los Angeles Times and *The Goodland Daily News*.



A crowd of about 7,000 waited patiently Saturday afternoon for the return of the 24 Navy crew members to their home base at Whidbey Island, Wash.

Goodland's Jeff Vignery was one of the crew members held for 11 days in China. Photos by Debra Malmos / The Goodland Daily News



**Standoff U.S.-China**  
Navy pilot Jeff Vignery and 23 crew back home 16 days



A U.S. Navy spy plane, like the one hit by a Chinese fighter, was parked at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station on Saturday.

## Officer thanks God, family and Americans

By Rachel Miscall

The Goodland Daily News

Lt. Jeff Vignery said he had already received Jesus Christ as his personal savior, but when the Navy spy plane he was helping to fly went into a nose dive, he said a quick prayer, taking Jesus into his heart again.

"I wanted to make sure," he said. "Just in case I hadn't done it right the first time."

Vignery, a 1992 Goodland High School graduate, is one of 24 American officers held in China for 11 days after their EP-E3 surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea.

Chinese officials released the crew members on Wednesday and they returned to the Naval Air Station in Whidbey Island, Wash., on Saturday, greeted by their families and 7,000 other cheering Americans. The \$80 million plane is still on Hainan Island, but U.S. and Chinese officials plan to meet Wednesday to discuss its return and other issues.

## Vignery will visit hometown

The 24 crew members detained in China for 11 days are each getting 30 days off, and Lt. Jeff Vignery said he plans to come home to Goodland in that time.

Vignery, a University of Kansas graduate, said he plans to visit friends and family in Goodland and across Kansas, but has to talk with his commanding officer before setting a date.

He said he's talked to high school buddy Dan Hayden, who works at Bankwest, and plans to contact friends in Salina. Vignery said he and his wife Julie, who he met in college and married in 1997, also will visit her family in Dodge City.

Community leaders have said they will plan a homecoming celebration for the 1992 Goodland High School graduate.

But first, the Navy pilot said, he wants to get back in the cockpit of a plane to build up his confidence.

"I want to let myself know that I can do it," he said.

Jeff's parents, Ron and Judi Vignery of Goodland, flew to Washington on Friday along with Jeff's older sister Jennifer; his brother Joshua, a student at the University of Kansas; and his sister Jessica, a Goodland High School student.

Ron Vignery, a partner in the Vignery and Mason law firm, said he was overcome by emotion when his son, who had just flown into the air base with the 23 other crew members, walked up to him.

"I couldn't talk," he said. "I was crying. Everybody was crying."

From his home on Whidbey Island on Monday morning, Jeff Vignery said he thanks God for placing guardian angels on each of the crew members' shoulders.

He said a higher power helped them through the 11-day ordeal, which began when the planes collided, destroying the Chinese jet and knocking the nose off the U.S. plane.

"All we could see was water through the plane's front window," he said. "At that point we all thought we were going to die."

Vignery, 27, was commissioned as a Navy pilot in 1997. He said after a quick prayer, he began helping the pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn, who landed the plane in China, get control over the plane. The craft was diving toward the water below and shaking violently, and Vignery also was making Mayday calls. The accident happened at 22,500 feet, he said, and the plane fell 7,500 feet before he and Osborn were able to get the wings level.

But, Vignery said, the plane continued to fall and the crew got ready to bail out.

"It wasn't until around 10,000 feet," he said, "that we had gained enough control to start discussing the situation with the pilot and flight engineers."

He said the crew started going down the ditching check list, preparing for a water landing, and he and the two other pilots swapped seats, preparing to jump out of the plane.

Vignery said he went to the back of the plane and was waiting for the signal to jump when he heard the landing gear descending.

"I didn't even know we were going to land," he said, "until I heard the landing gear."

Armed Chinese soldiers met the crew at the plane's entrance, Vignery said, but they didn't threaten them or aim their guns.

"There were a lot of Chinese military," he said, "and some did have guns, but they never pointed them at us."



Lt. Jeff Vignery, co-pilot of the downed U.S. electronics plane, waited for his turn to enter the hangar at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station on Saturday.

Of course, the young pilot said, that didn't lessen the seriousness of the situation.

"They don't point the guns at you," he said, "but you feel like you need to do what they tell you to do."

Vignery said he is barred from revealing details, but did say that Chinese officials interrogated crew members individually and talked about putting the U.S. officers on trial for the accident, in which a Chinese pilot died.

"I can't talk about it," he said, "but I can say it wasn't fun."

The crew was fed well, Vignery said, eating mostly the traditional Chinese staples of rice, vegetables and fish.

He said only one of the crew was brave enough to try the fish head that usually sat atop a mound of rice on each plate.

To keep spirits up, he said, the crew