

**Miramar CLF Report
April 24 2008**

This month, the members of the Community Leaders Forum were afforded a tour of VMGR-352.

OK, now just what is a VMGR-352 you might ask? This is a Marine aircraft squadron; specifically, it is a transport and air refueling squadron – the only one at Miramar. The squadron supports not only the F-18s and CH-53 helicopters at Miramar; it also supports the First Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton.

For those of you interested in acronyms and other minutia, the “V” in VMGR means “fixed wing,” while the “M” naturally means “Marine.” The letter “G” stands for “transport” (not sure I get that one) and, of course the letter “R” stands for “refueling.”

VMGR-352 has been around a long time – since WWII, actually. The aircraft flown back then were R4Ds and R5Ds. The squadron was initially based at MCAS Cherry Point on the East Coast. The squadron moved to Hawaii in 1945 where it remained until 1949 and participated in the Berlin Airlift.

In 1949 the squadron moved to its new base in El Toro and supported the Korean conflict. For the remainder of the 1950s, the unit conducted peace training and provided operational support to Fleet Marine Forces worldwide.

VMGR-352 received their first KC-130 “Hercules” in 1961. Note that date: 1961! Since that time, the squadron has participated in numerous “transpacs” of aircraft beginning with the movement of 18 F-8U Crusaders from El Toro to Japan. On this type of operation, the C-130s lead the fighter aircraft across the Pacific, refueling the fighters as they go.

The squadron has participated in the Cuban Missile Crises, the Vietnam conflict, operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Kuwait Theater of Operations, evacuation operations in Kenya and Eritrea, Africa as well as other operations in Africa.

The squadron moved to Miramar in 1999 and participated in operation Northern Watch in Incirlik, Turkey that same year. For four months, the squadron aircraft were continually on call to provide Helicopter Aerial Refueling for the 66th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron should the need arise to conduct any Combat Search and Rescue missions. After the tragic earthquakes in Turkey, the squadron detachment became an integral part of the humanitarian relief effort that provided care and basic life necessities to the thousands of victims of those earthquakes.

Due to Hurricane Dora's impending assault on the Johnston Atoll in August of that year, the squadron evacuated all military and DOD employees from Johnston Island to Hawaii and returned all personnel shortly thereafter.

In February 2000, the squadron provided refueling support to the F-18s in defense of the Southern Iraq No-Fly Zone, as a well as refueling support for any Combat Search and Rescue Missions, as needed.

Two years later, the squadron deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, providing aerial refueling support to forces fighting the War on Terrorism. During this operation, VMGR-352 was augmented by two reserve VMGR squadrons to form the largest assemblage of KC-130s in history.

This C-130 squadron here at Miramar is arguably one of the best, if not the best VMGR squadron in the Marine Corps. The awards list is paragraphs long and attests to their performance, efficiency and admirable safety record.

Now for the real interesting part: For 47 years, this squadron has been flying the venerable Lockheed C-130 aircraft. This is a testament to the great design of this versatile aircraft. And no, VMGR's C-130s are not 47 years old. In fact, all twelve of their aircraft were built in 2006. These new aircraft have very powerful engines with 6-blade propellers that eliminate the need for rocket-assisted take-offs. Some of you who may have seen the Blue Angels' C-130 perform that spectacular rapid climb with rocket assist. VMGR-352's C-130s can perform that same climb on the power of the engines alone.

The squadron “powered up” one of these shiny new aircraft for us. I had the opportunity to sit in the pilot’s seat in the cockpit and experience a demonstration of the computer-assisted capabilities of this amazing aircraft. As an old Vietnam Vet who had flown my share of hours in C-130s, this new aircraft was an absolute marvel in modern technology. Round dials and gauges have been replaced by flat panel TV like screens that depict an amazing amount of flight and navigation data. The aircrews plan their missions on laptop computers, transfer that planning data to a flight simulator and then “practice fly” the mission on the simulator without ever leaving the ground. The data is tweaked and massaged and then transferred to the aircraft’s computers for the actual mission. With that amazing technology, it is no wonder the squadron has such an enviable safety record.

So, the next time you drive by Miramar on the I-15, take note of that new hanger on east end of the field. That is hanger “Zero” so named because it was built after hangers 1 through 6 were already in place. That hanger is home to the VMGR-352 “Raiders” and their new and powerful C-130s. Those shiny aircraft lined up in front of the hanger are the latest and greatest model of a very famous aircraft. The men and women who fly and maintain these planes are first rate.

We members of the Community Leaders Forum certainly appreciated the courtesy we were afforded by LCOL Barnes and the “Raiders” of VMGR-352. We all learned a great deal about this organization on board MCAS Miramar.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C Frederick