

Miramar CLF Report January 09

This month, the CLF members were afforded the opportunity to visit an operational F/A-18 squadron. VMFA (AW)-225 has a long history flying in defense of this nation. They were initially established as VMF-225. In the Navy and Marine Corps, the initials of a squadron tell you what type of squadron it is and what the squadron's primary mission is. In this case (VMF-225), the "V" means "Fixed Wing." The "M" means "Marine Corps" and the "F" means "Fighter." A Fighter Squadron's primary mission is Air-to-Air Combat. The numbers designate a specific squadron.

VMF-225 was established in 1943 and flew F-4U Corsairs during World War II and Korea. In 1952, the squadron was re-established as VMA-225. The "A" in the squadron designation signifies "Attack" or Air-to-Ground. The squadron exchanged their F-4U Corsairs for the larger and more powerful AD-5 Skyraider. In 1958, the squadron transitioned to jet aircraft, now flying the Douglas A-4B Skyhawk.

In 1965, the squadron entered the Vietnam conflict and operated out of Chu Lai airbase in South Vietnam. A year later, the squadron transitioned to the Grumman A-6 Intruder and the squadron designation was changed yet again to VMA (AW)-225. The "AW" in the designator refers to "All Weather." After flying many missions out of Chu Lai and Da Nang Air Bases during the Vietnam conflict, VMA (AW)-225 was dis-established in 1972.

The "Vikings" of VMFA (AW)-225 were established in 1991 at MCAS El Toro, California, now flying the F/A-18D Hornet. The F/A-18 is a multi-mission aircraft, fully capable of performing both the fighter and ground attack mission. Hence you will note the squadron designator now reads VMFA(AW)-225, or "Fixed Wing Marine Fighter Attack All Weather-225."

Members of the CLF learned that not all Marine Corps F/A-18 squadrons are alike. The F/A-18 has been manufactured in the A, B, C, D, E, and F variants. The "A" model aircraft are single seat and, by now, very old. The "A" model is only flown by the Navy's Blue Angels Flight Demonstration Team, which you see at the Miramar Air Show and others. The "B" model is a two-seater and has flight controls in both cockpits. It is primarily used as a trainer to transition pilots into the F/A-18. VMFAT-101 is the F/A-18 training squadron at Miramar. The "C" model is a single seat aircraft and is the aircraft the Marine Squadrons fly off the aircraft carriers. The "D" model, the aircraft flown by VMFA (AW)-225 has two seats but no flight controls in the rear cockpit. A weapons systems officer mans the rear cockpit. The F/A-18 D squadrons are referred to as "Expeditionary Squadrons." They do not fly from the aircraft carriers. Rather, they fly from their U.S. base on the wing of a C-130 tanker aircraft all the way across the ocean to set up an

“Expeditionary Base” in airfields such as Al Jaber, Kuwait or Al Asad, Iraq. They will operate “in country” in support of ground operations for months. The E/F models of the F/A-18 are called “Super Hornets” and are flown by the Navy, not the Marine Corps.

The F/A-18D model is a very special aircraft. It has two seats. The pilot sits in front and the weapons system officer sits in the back seat. There are no flight controls in the rear cockpit. The crew operates as a team, each with their own set of radios and the aircraft normally takes-off in combat with a varied load of “smart” weapons.

Smart weapons are missiles and bombs that are precision guided by laser or satellite. They are extremely accurate to the point that they can be flown right through a window in a building. The weapons system officer employs these weapons with sensors so accurate that the crew can read a license plate from 17,000 feet. This accuracy is extremely important in the close air support mission where weapons must be employed in close proximity to friendly troops and non-combatants. With special training the weapons officer in the rear cockpit of the F/A-18D can perform the functions of Forward Air Control Airborne (FAC-A). With the ability to communicate with friendly troops on the ground as well as other aircraft, the FAC-A can direct the employment of precision weapons in support of ground operations.

VMFA (AW)-225 moved from El Toro California to MCAS Miramar in 1995. During the conflicts in the Middle East, the squadron has deployed to Al Jaber, Kuwait and more recently to Al Asad, Iraq.

On January 15, 2009, members of the CLF were invited to spend an afternoon with the pilots and aircrew members of VMFA (AW)-225. LtCol Douglas Pasnik is the Commanding Officer of the squadron. The Executive Officer, or “XO” is LtCol Daniel Shipley. The XO and three of the aircrew, Capt Erbecker, Capt Yasumatsu, and 1stLt Dunsworth provided the CLF members with a tour of the squadron spaces, a very professional power point presentation concerning the squadron, the aircraft, the mission, the weapons capabilities and some films of combat action in theatre. We were also afforded the opportunity to closely inspect an F/A-18D that the squadron had positioned in the hanger for us.

I was able to bring along as guests, four gentlemen from Rancho Bernardo who thoroughly enjoyed the day. They were Irv Sherman, Dick Walker, Don Norris and George Leitner. This was a very rare opportunity for members of the public to get an “inside look” at the workings of a modern day Marine Corps combat squadron.

The February CLF meeting date is yet to be determined.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C Frederick