

## **Miramar CLF Report Feb 15, 2009**

The February 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Community Leaders Forum took place in the Commanding Officers Conference Room at 5:30 p.m. There were about fifteen of us present from various communities around the county.

The presentation this month was really quite interesting. LtCol Mitch Cassell from the 3D Marine Aircraft Wing discussed Helicopter Training at MCAS Miramar. It is important to note here that Cassell was not talking about teaching new pilots how to fly helicopters. Rather, the "Training" discussed in his presentation regarded training, or in many cases, "retraining" aircrews to be ready for combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Our Marine helicopter squadrons here at Miramar deploy frequently to Iraq and Afghanistan. When they return from the theater, they only have about 7-12 months to prepare for the next deployment. The Marine Corps requires its units to be prepared (trained) in all respects prior to each combat deployment. This is a very detailed and extensive program that involves the training of the individual as well as the group. Individual Marines must accomplish certain requirements during the training cycle and the squadron as a whole must accomplish certain requirements.

The squadrons train in scenarios that mimic theater conditions as much as possible. This means lots of desert training. They have something called "PTP" which stands for Predeployment Training Program. The PTP makes sure that the training matches the expected combat environment as closely as possible and sets the standards by which all units must train to.

It was interesting for me to learn that this program is very intense, very specific and has absolute requirements that must be met before a squadron is ready to go into combat. All Marines, whether pilots, air crewmen, or ground support personnel must complete individual proficiency training. Some things they must master include First Aid, Weapons Marksmanship, Physical Fitness, Gas Chamber, Swim Qualifications, Drivers Training, Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detection and neutralization.

The pilots work proficiency in specific mission profiles and flight leadership qualifications. They need to refresh on day and night aerial refueling, night flying with night vision goggles and other Mission Essential Tasks. The helicopters deploy and operate from advanced bases, expeditionary airfields, Forward Operating Bases and naval shipping. Shipboard approaches and landings must be perfected.

Many of us in the civilian communities are not aware that many of the maneuvers the pilots must be proficient in are actually practiced over and over on simulators. These simulators are quite advanced and the main advantage is that in-flight emergencies can be practiced over and over. Instructors can cause systems to malfunction, engines to fail and weather to turn bad, all with the push of a few buttons.

The squadrons train at Miramar, of course, mainly to practice approaches and landings. But they also train at Camp Pendleton, Twenty Nine Palms and the Yuma training complex.

Many of the training flights require prerequisites. That means that a certain training flight must be successfully completed before the next flight can be scheduled. This, and the requirement for all crews to be completely competent in night flying and night vision goggles necessitates that many helicopters are up and operating on the blackest nights.

All of this is a big challenge for the squadrons. The short turn-around cycle and finite number of training days available prior to the next deployment can cause competition for resources, personnel, training ranges, and supply parts, which affect aircraft availability. Priority for parts always goes to the units involved in actual combat, so that means the squadrons back at Miramar can have difficulty keeping the aircraft in operational condition so that training can be accomplished.

On a personal note, we civilians sometimes complain when a helicopter flies over at night. We wonder why they couldn't do those flights in the daytime. With just a little thought, we should realize that a large share of the combat missions occurs at night and the only time to adequately train for that environment is at night. It is only when one gets a look at the training requirements our crews must complete that we realize they do amazingly well with the short amount of time that they have to train.

Regarding noise complaints for the month of January 2009 – North County continues to generate very few noise complaints. The I-15 helicopter route was over flown 161 times during the month, generating one single noise complaint, which did not come from Rancho Bernardo. The Julian Jet Departure experienced 984 operations during the month with zero noise complaints from anyone. Interestingly enough, the beach experienced 13 noise complaints, eleven of which were from a single individual.

Lastly, planning is in the works for the arrival in a couple of years of the V-22 Osprey which will initially replace the CH-46 helicopters at Miramar and Camp Pendleton. The Marine Corps is required to conduct an environmental study of possible impacts of this change of aircraft. The Draft Environmental Statement (DEIS) for the Osprey is now available at the library and on line at <http://www.mv22eiswest.net/>.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C Frederick