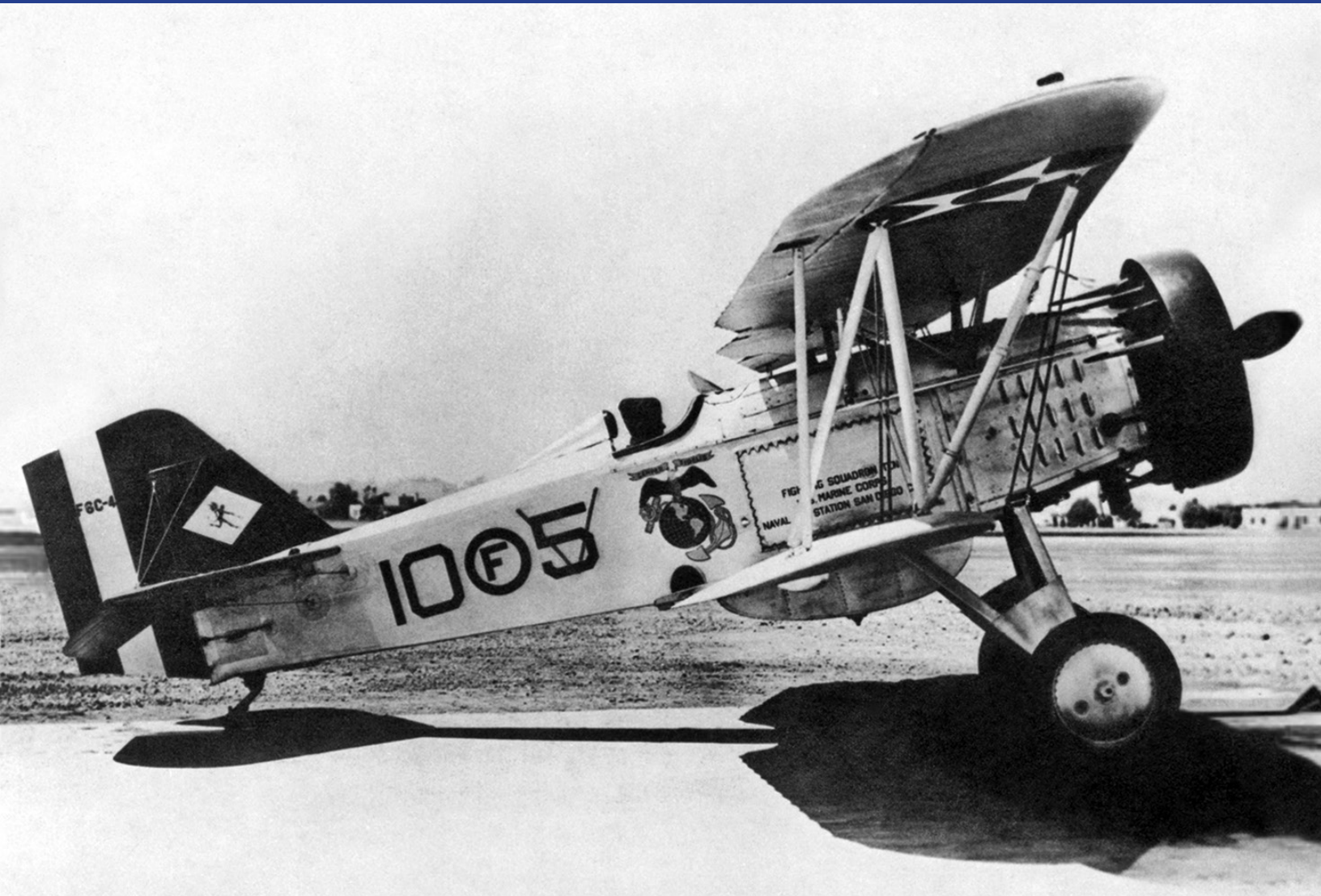


A HISTORY OF MARINE FIGHTER ATTACK SQUADRON 232

SECOND EDITION



HISTORY DIVISION
U.S. MARINE CORPS
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA

A Curtiss F6C-4 Hawk belonging to Marine Fighting Plane Squadron 10 (VF-10M), the forerunner of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232 (VMFA-232), on the line at Naval Air Station San Diego, California, in August 1931. The squadron's Red Devil insignia that has survived through the years is clearly visible on the vertical stabilizer.

Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

A History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232

Second Edition



by
Major William J. Sambito, USMC

updated by
Dr. Fred H. Allison

History Division
United States Marine Corps
Quantico, Virginia

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Foreword

This is a history of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232 (VMFA-232). It traces the operations of VMFA-232's Red Devils from 1925 to 2012. It is one in a series of Marine squadron histories in which we hope to bring to light the achievements of individual squadrons and relate them to the general development of Marine aviation.

Major William J. Sambito wrote the original history that covers 1925–77 and was published by the U.S. Marine Corps History and Museums Division in 1978. Major Sambito earned his bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Colby College in Maine and is an experienced helicopter pilot, who served with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadrons 262 and 165 during the Vietnam War. After attending the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, he was assigned to the History and Museums Division in January 1975.

In 2013, Dr. Fred H. Allison began the update for this history, bringing the squadron's story up to the present. Allison is also a Marine aviator; he served as a radar intercept officer from 1978–92 in McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom aircraft in VMFA-212 and VMFA-112. He earned his PhD in military history from Texas Tech University and wrote his dissertation on Marine Corps developments in close air support. He joined what is now Marine Corps History Division in 2000 and has written several aviation-related articles; he also was an editor/compiler of the history publication *Pathbreakers*. Currently, he serves as an oral historian with History Division.

The Red Devil squadron is the Marine Corps' oldest active squadron. This history provides an informative overview of the development and action of the squadron spanning almost nine decades. It is a proud unit with an enviable operational history. History Division is pleased to provide this history of VMFA-232 as a means to recognize the squadron's contributions in defending the nation.

Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History

Preface

The Red Devil squadron of VMFA-232 is regarded as the Marine Corps' oldest squadron. This is a narrative account of the squadron from its beginning in 1925 to 2012. It is a brief history, and as such it only covers the major movements of the squadron and the most significant operations. The first part of the book, written by Major William J. Sambito, lays out the origins of the squadron, its early days in the pioneering era of military aviation, and its participation in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. This updated edition picks up the story after Vietnam through to 2012. Included in that period are squadron activities of the 1980s as the Cold War came to an end. Yet, peace did not ensue and, within months of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Red Devils were flying in Operation Desert Storm. In the 1990s, the Red Devils, like all of Marine aviation, incorporated new tactics that emphasized supporting ground combat. The events of 11 September 2001 created a conflict that only now, in 2014, is winding down. In several deployments, the Red Devils in Iraq and Afghanistan, flying from sea and land, effectively supported Coalition efforts against terrorists.

VMFA-232 is steeped in tradition and continually holds its standards high. It is hoped that this brief history adequately sketches the story and prompts others to contribute their insights, remembrances, records, photographs, and other memorabilia so that the complete history may be written someday.

The original manuscript was typed by Cathy Stoll and prepared for publication by the production editor, Douglas Johnston. The current History Division's Editing and Design Branch, headed by Angela Anderson, prepared the manuscript for publication. Jennifer Clampet and Shawn Vreeland reviewed and edited the text, while Vincent J. Martinez executed the layout and design. The content from the first edition has been left primarily intact, with revisions made only to provide clarity or to accommodate the current History Division style for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Most of the photographs in the original as well as the updated section are official Department of Defense (U.S. Marine Corps) photographs. Other photos were donated by Lieutenant General Richard C. Mangrum. I am grateful to Don Brammer for his assistance with photographs. Lieutenant Colonel Byron D. Sullivan, who commanded the squadron while I wrote the latter part of this book, provided critical support and assigned Captains Eric R. Moos and Chad D. Allen as points of contact. Both were extremely helpful.

Former Red Devils, General William L. Nyland, Lieutenant Colonel Simon M. Doran, John F. Luhmann, Cono R. Borrelli, Daniel L. Shipley, Travis L. Kelley, and Dustin J. Byrum, provided valuable assistance with photographs, interviews, and commentary. Finally, I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Jerry J. Estell, who leads the squadron as this book goes to print. His support and encouragement are valued and appreciated.

Fred H. Allison, PhD
Marine Corps History Division

A History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232

Early Developments

The original “Red Devil” squadron was activated 1 September 1925 as Division 1, Fighting Plane Squadron 3M (VF-3M), 2d Aviation Group, at Naval Air Station (NAS) San Diego, California. At the time of activation, only Division 1 was manned. This element provided the nucleus for the squadron that eventually became Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232 (VMFA-232).^{1*} The squadron’s first commanding officer, Second Lieutenant Clayton C. Jerome,^{2**} retained command for only 19 days before relinquishing his

*The terms “squadron” and “division,” as used in the 1920s, may be misleading to those familiar with today’s aviation organization. Their meaning at that time, as well as the overall purpose of the organization adopted, was explained in 1926 by Major Edwin H. Brainard. “Marine Corps aviation,” he told students at Marine Corps Base Quantico, “is organized along Navy lines, with the division as the administrative unit and the squadron as the tactical unit. In order to have an organization capable of large expansion in time of emergency, the peacetime squadrons are only one-third their war strength (i.e., one division active and two inactive). A division consists of 75 enlisted men and 10 commissioned officers. This gives the nucleus around which to recruit the two inactive divisions, and the addition of a squadron commander and staff gives a war strength unit that should be fairly efficient and capable of shortly performing any task. A division consists of six planes active and three in reserve. Therefore, a full strength squadron has 18 active planes and 9 in reserve, and in addition 2 planes attached to squadron headquarters and one transport.”

**Jerome graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1922 and completed his flight training at Pensacola, Florida, in 1925. Later as a major general and veteran of five World War II campaigns, he commanded the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW) in Korea from April 1952 to January 1953. Upon his retirement in 1958, he was promoted to lieutenant general. He died on 13 February 1978 in Washington, DC.

position to First Lieutenant William J. Wallace.* Lieutenant Wallace’s squadron then consisted of Lieutenant Jerome plus 78 enlisted men.

The first aircraft assigned to the new squadron was the Vought VE-7SF Bluebird. This single-seat fighter-trainer was first received in the Marine Corps inventory in 1921. Powered by a single 180-horsepower engine, this biplane had a maximum speed of approximately 150 miles per hour. During 1926, the unit began replacing the VE-7SFs with Boeing FB-1 fighters. The Boeing biplane was equipped with a Curtiss 410-horsepower engine, was capable of a speed of 167 miles per hour, and had a service ceiling of 21,200 feet.

The squadron remained at NAS San Diego until 7 April 1927. Then, embarked on board the naval transport USS *Henderson* (AP 1), the unit, now boasting five aviators, sailed for China as part of Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler’s 3d Brigade. The mission of this force was to protect the lives and property of the U.S. nationals in China during a period of civil turmoil. The *Henderson* arrived in Shanghai, China, on 3 May, only to find that arrangements with the Chinese government for the use of a landing field had not been completed. The aviation component, consisting of Marine Observation Squadron 5 and VF-3M, both under the command of Major Francis T. Evans and later Lieutenant Colonel

*Wallace was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1918. As a lieutenant colonel, he was executive officer of Marine Aircraft Group 21 (MAG-21) in Hawaii when the Japanese attacked. Later, as a colonel, he commanded MAG-23 at Guadalcanal and, as a brigadier general, commanded the Air Defense and Fighter Command in Okinawa, Japan, in 1945. From 1945 to 1950, MajGen Wallace was the director of Marine Corps aviation. In 1952, after 34 years of service, he retired with the rank of lieutenant general. He died on 7 July 1977.



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

A Boeing FB-1 fighter plane, which eventually replaced the Navy's Vought VE-7 Bluebird fighter aircraft, sits on a Marine landing strip in Tientsin, China, in 1927.

Thomas C. Turner, proceeded to Naval Station Subic Bay, Luzon, Philippine Islands, where it remained until returning to Shanghai on 13 June 1927.³

The squadrons stayed in the Shanghai area on board the *Henderson* until 25 June and then began the voyage north to Tientsin. On 30 June, the units arrived at Camp MacMurray, Hsin Ho, China, where they were joined by the ground element of the 3d Brigade. Twelve days after arriving in China, VF-3M was redesignated Fighting Plane Squadron 10M (VF-10M) and, on 1 July 1928, the squadron designation was changed to Fighting Plane Squadron 6M (VF-6M). During its stay in China, the squadron engaged in training, aerial photography, mapping, and reconnaissance missions around Tientsin.⁴

On 3 October 1928, with its mission in China completed, the squadron sailed for California,

again on board the USS *Henderson*. After stops en route at Guam on 10 October and Honolulu on the 21st, the ship arrived at San Diego on 31 October. The unit was reassigned to Aircraft Squadrons, West Coast Expeditionary Force, NAS San Diego. The squadron, now reduced to 2 officers and 68 enlisted men, began the process of rebuilding and training newly designated aviators. Training consisted of familiarization, basic instruments, combat maneuvering, and gunnery proficiency flights.

In 1929, the squadron acquired a new aircraft. The plane that replaced the FB-1 was the newer Boeing FB-5 Hawk. The FB-5 was similar in appearance to the earlier model, but had a slightly larger Packard 475-horsepower engine that increased airspeed to 170 miles per hour. Shortly after receiving the new planes, the squadron officially adopted the "Red Devil" insignia.

Lieutenant General Richard C. Mangrum,* however, remembers that, “The Red Devil insignia certainly antedated 1930. It was on the FB-1s and FB-5s in 1929, and my impression is that it dated back at least to the mid-1920s.”⁵ According to a Chief of Naval Operations letter to the commanding officer of Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 232 (VMTB-232) on 30 August 1944, the Red Devil design, “submitted in 1930, has a white field, a black border, and a bright-red flying devil. The field is diamond-shaped, measures 12” on each side and is superimposed on aluminum-enameled airplane fabric.” The letter went on to say, “The origin and significance of ‘Red Devils’ is not recorded.”⁶ So the reason for adoption of this particular motif remains a mystery. Although the squadron’s designation changed several times in the years to follow, the insignia survived in its original form throughout the unit’s history.⁷

On 1 July 1930, the squadron underwent another change in designation, this time reverting to VF-10M, the designation it had used during its first year in China. Also in July 1930, the squadron received Curtiss F6C-4 Hawks, which replaced the FB-5s. Lieutenant General Mangrum recalls the event:

We got nine of them, second-hand from the Navy, in bad shape and all needing overhaul. Six were put into overhaul im-



Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the Marine Corps
Marine ordnance troops stand next to a Curtiss F6C-4 Hawk fighter of VF-10M at NAS San Diego, California, in 1932.

mediately by the engineering unit, and three were retained as flyable while the first six were overhauled.⁸

This single-seat fighter, powered by a 410-horsepower radial engine, was not appreciably different than the FB-1s and the FB-5s. The pilots quickly adjusted to the F6C-4 and, by September, VF-10M was attached to the Army’s 95th Pursuit Group, commanded by Major Carl Spaatz, [for a joint exercise] to [mimic] the defense of the San Francisco area against attacking carriers, [in this case] the USS *Lexington* (CV 2) and *Saratoga* (CV 3). General Mangrum, recalling the event, states:

The six were under the command of Bill McKittrick, and included Paul Putnam and Mike Wodarczyk and me.* We based at Crissy Field at the Presidio in San Francisco, and later at the Curtiss-Wright

*Mangrum had a distinguished career in Marine aviation. He was designated a naval aviator on 20 August 1929 and, for the next 12 years, served in a variety of Marine aviation billets on the West Coast and was a member of VF-6M in 1930. In 1942, as a major, he commanded Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 232 against the Japanese, and was awarded the Navy Cross and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Later during the Korean War, as a colonel, he commanded MAG-12. As a major general, he commanded both the 1st and 2d MAWs. On 1 October 1965, he succeeded to the title “Grey Eagle” of naval aviation, and was the first Marine aviator to attain this distinction. Grey Eagle is the earliest designated aviator on active duty in the Navy and Marine Corps. His final assignment in the Marine Corps was as Assistant Commandant from 1965–67. LtGen Mangrum retired on 30 June 1967.

*McKittrick was promoted to major general upon retiring on 1 October 1951. Paul A. Putnam stayed on active duty until June 1956, rising to the rank of colonel; he was promoted to brigadier general on the retired list. Michael Wodarczyk was appointed as a captain in February 1942. He was placed on the retired list as a colonel in June 1946. All three had highly successful careers in Marine Corps aviation.

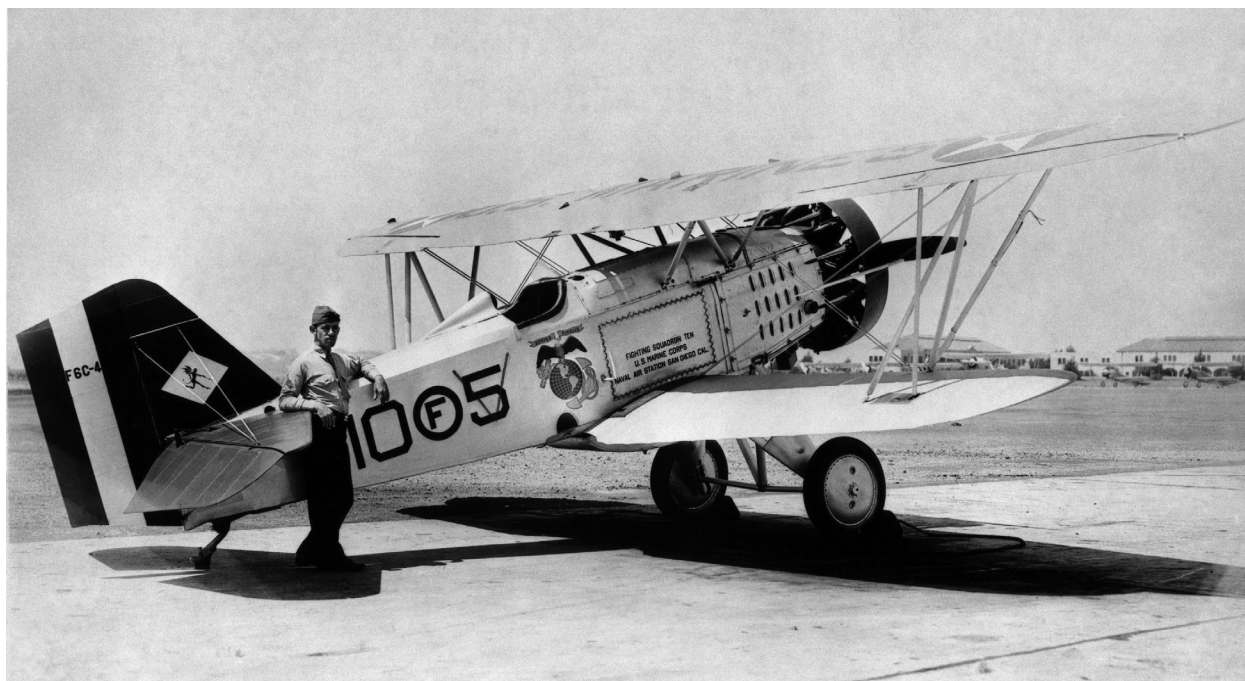


Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

A Marine with VF-10M stands next to a Curtiss F6C-4 at NAS San Diego on 18 August 1931.

field on San Francisco Bay, later to become the present San Francisco airport. Fog was over the Bay the day we arrived; ceiling about 400 feet. As we passed San Francisco waterfront heading for Crissy Field, Gunner Mike Wodarczyk had an engine failure, landed in the water off one of the piers. Fortunately, a freighter just backing out for departure put a sling on the tail of Mike's plane, hoisted him aboard, and dropped him off at the Army's Fort Mason en route out the Golden Gate. Why and how VF-10M got mixed up with the Army in this exercise, I don't remember.⁹

After the exercise with the Army, the squadron returned to NAS San Diego.

By the end of June 1932, the Red Devils had logged nearly 2,000 hours of accident-free flying. For this accomplishment, the Major General Commandant, Ben H. Fuller, awarded the unit

the Herbert H. Schiff Memorial Cup* for fiscal year 1932.¹⁰ During late 1932, the squadron began receiving its first F4B-4 fighters. The Red Devils became the second Marine Corps unit to be equipped with this single-engine biplane. The plane could take off in 440 feet, land at 63 miles per hour, and had a top speed of 184 miles per hour.

In 1933, the squadron participated in the Los Angeles National Air Races held 1–4 July. By the time the races took place, the Red Devils were thoroughly familiar with the new machine. A six-man aeronautical team consisting of Captain Vernon M. Guymon,** the commanding officer,

*The Schiff Memorial Cup was established in memory of Lt Herbert H. Schiff, USN, who served as an aviator in World War I and was killed in an aircraft accident on 11 July 1924. This award was presented annually to a naval aviation squadron for outstanding performance in the area of aviation safety.

**Guymon served as assistant wing commander for 2d MAF during World War II and retired in 1949 with the rank of brigadier general.



Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the Marine Corps

Along with its new designation, Bombing Plane Squadron 4M received BG-1 bombers in 1935. The BG-1 was built by Great Lakes and carried a pilot and a bombardier/gunner. It was known throughout Marine aviation as the "Bee-Gee."

Second Lieutenant Samuel S. Jack,* Marine Gunners Michael Wodarczyk and Albert S. Munsch, Gunnery Sergeant Kenneth A. Woolsey, and Staff Sergeant William E. Ward demonstrated to the Services and the nation the daring and skill of Marine aviators. The first day of the races also marked the beginning of a new mission for the Red Devils. "Fighting Ten" was redesignated as Bombing Plane Squadron 4M (VB-4M) on that date.

The squadron continued its normal training and familiarization routine until 14 February 1935, when the commander in chief of the United States Fleet assigned Aircraft Two, of which VB-4M was a part, to Aircraft, Battle Force, United States Fleet for operations. From 29 April to 12 June, the Red Devils participated



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo
Personnel and aircraft, including the Red Devils' Boeing F4B-4 fighter planes lined up in the front row, stand ready for inspection at NAS San Diego in April 1933.

in fleet training and United States Fleet Problem XIV. During June, upon return from fleet training, the squadron received 16 Great Lakes BG-1 bombers as replacements for its F4Bs. The single-engine biplane was powered by a Pratt & Whitney 750-horsepower engine, which enabled it to reach a speed of 206 miles per hour.

*Jack served during World War II on Guadalcanal, New Caledonia, and in the New Hebrides. During the Korean War, he served as chief of staff for 1st MAF and later as commanding general. In 1961, he retired with the rank of major general.



Photo courtesy of the National Museum of the Marine Corps

Marine ordnance troops load a bomb onto a Douglas SBD-1 Dauntless scout bomber during World War II. Marine Bombing Squadron 2 first received the two-seat monoplane late in 1940.

In 1936, after becoming familiar with the BG-1, the squadron conducted flight operations on board the carriers *Lexington* and *Saratoga*. On 1 July 1937, the unit was redesignated as Marine Bombing Squadron 2 (VMB-2). In 1938, while embarked on board the *Lexington* for Fleet Problem XIX, VMB-2 made 187 accident-free landings. During the week of 23–28 May 1938, the Red Devils were again at sea, this time on board the USS *Ranger* (CV 4) for training and carrier operations. Between cruises, the squadron returned to its home base, NAS San Diego. During late 1940, the squadron turned in its BG-1s and replaced them with the new Douglas



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

Marine aircraft sit at MCAS Ewa, Oahu, Hawaii, in 1942. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, most of the Red Devils' aircraft, which were lined up on the MCAS Ewa airfield, were destroyed while still on the ground.

SBD-1 Dauntless scout bombers. The two-seat monoplane was equipped with two .50-caliber machine guns in the nose and two .30-caliber guns on a flexible mount in the rear cockpit. For dive-bombing, one 1,000-pound bomb could be carried beneath the fuselage, and two 100-pound bombs were mounted under the wings.

World War II

On 11 January 1941, in response to the ever-mounting tension in the Pacific, the squadron moved from NAS San Diego to Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Ewa, Oahu, Hawaii,* on board the USS *Enterprise* (CV 6). On 21 January, VMB-2—with 21 officers, 116 enlisted men, and 20 Dauntless scout bombers—arrived in Hawaii and was assigned to the 2d Marine Aircraft Group (MAG-2), Fleet Marine Force. The unit immediately began flight operations as part of the islands' defensive air patrol system. On 1 July 1941, the squadron was redesignated Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 232 (VMSB-232) and on 1 August the 2d Marine Aircraft Group became Marine Aircraft Group 21, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December, the Red Devils' 20 SBDs were lined up on the field at MCAS Ewa. Twenty-five minutes later, 9 were completely destroyed and 10 were so badly damaged that they required major overhaul. Only one plane escaped with minor damage. One squadron member was killed during the attack. On Wake Island, however, where the Red Devils had a detachment of 25 enlisted Marines, the casualty count was higher. Eight were killed before the Japanese landed, and the remainder were either killed or captured while assisting in the defense of the island.¹¹

For the next eight months, VMSB-232 remained at MCAS Ewa where it received 12

*Hawaii was a U.S. territory until 1959 when it became a state.



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo
Three Marine pilots with Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 232 stand before the unit's sign at an advance South Pacific base, ca. 1943–44.

new SBD-3 Dauntlesses powered by larger 1,100-horsepower engines. Then, in August 1942, the opportunity came to avenge the attacks on Pearl Harbor and Wake Island. Assigned to MAG-23, the squadron embarked with its new SBD-3 Dauntlesses on board the escort carrier USS *Long Island* (CVE 1) and, on 20 August, landed on Guadalcanal's 3,000-foot dirt runway called Henderson Field. The first combat missions were flown on 23 August. Although several Japanese ships were sighted, it was not until the 25th that the squadron, now assigned to the 1st MAF, scored any confirmed hits. Second Lieutenant Lawrence Baldinus seriously damaged an enemy cruiser when he dropped a bomb on a ship just forward of the bridge. Two transports and a destroyer were also hit that day. Under the leadership of Major Mangrum, the Red Devils were in

almost daily action against the Japanese. When the squadron left Guadalcanal on 13 October 1942, Mangrum, newly promoted to lieutenant colonel, was the only pilot of the original 15 Guadalcanal Red Devils able to walk away from Henderson Field. Seven pilots had been killed, four wounded, and the rest evacuated.¹² For his actions at Guadalcanal, Mangrum received the Navy Cross and the first Distinguished Flying Cross awarded for the Guadalcanal campaign.

On 18 November, the squadron arrived at NAS San Diego and then moved to MCAS El Toro, California, where it remained, assigned to MAG-23, until it returned to the Pacific in July 1943. While at El Toro, the Red Devils acquired a new mission (torpedo bombing) and new equipment (the Grumman TBF-1 Avenger). This 1,600-horsepower aircraft carried a three-man crew: pilot, radio operator-undergunner, and rear-gunner. In addition to five machine guns, the plane carried one 2,000-pound naval torpedo or four 500-pound bombs.

With the change in mission came yet another change in unit designation. On 1 June 1943, the squadron became Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 232 (VMTB-232). On 16 July 1943, the squadron embarked and sailed from NAS San Diego on the USS *President Polk* (AP 103). It arrived at Noumea, New Caledonia, on 2 August. The following day, some of the personnel, an advance party, transferred to the SS *Dashing Wave* (a civilian-manned troopship operated by the War Shipping Administration) and steamed for Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, where they arrived on 6 August. The main body remained at Noumea until the 17th and then followed to Espiritu Santo on board the USS *Rixey* (APH 3). It arrived there on 20 August. Thus, by September 1943, the Red Devils were back in the Pacific helping to knock out Japanese shipping, airfields, and installations on virtually every island of the Solomons.

Through January 1944, the unit operated primarily in the vicinity of Bougainville Island



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo
LtGen Richard C. Mangrum commanded VMF-232 twice during his career, once while he was a second lieutenant in 1930 and again during World War II in the Pacific.

while flying from Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, Guadalcanal, and Munda on New Georgia. During this period, VMTB-232 was assigned to MAG-24. From Bougainville, operations shifted to the New Britain Island area (Papua New Guinea). On 17 January, hunting was especially good for the Red Devils. While attacking an enemy convoy, 15 of the 18 squadron TBFs hit targets. Navy and Marine Corps squadrons sank five ships and downed 17 Japanese fighters.¹³

From May to October 1944, the Red Devils flew from fields throughout the Solomons. From the New Hebrides in the south to Emirau in the north, the squadron, then assigned to MAG-11, sought out enemy targets. In November, the unit moved to Falalop Island, Ulithi Atoll, in the Caroline Islands and, on 1 January 1945, VMTB-232 supported the U.S. Army invasion of Fais Island in the Carolines. Until April 1945,



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

Weary VMTB-232 aircrews walk away from their Grumman TBF-1 Avengers upon arrival at Kadena Airfield, Okinawa, in April 1945.

the unit remained in the Ulithi area neutralizing Japanese-held bases, providing antisubmarine patrols, escorting convoys, and furnishing air defense for the fleet anchorage at Ulithi.

The next move for the Red Devils brought them to Okinawa on 22 April 1945, where they joined MAG-33 at Kadena Air Base. By the end of April, more than 100 missions had been flown. The cost to the squadron was two aircraft and crews lost to enemy action. While most of the glory of flying over Okinawa was achieved by the fighters, First Lieutenant Fred F. Folino in an Avenger shot down an enemy plane with air-to-ground rockets the night of 17 May, putting the Red Devils in the scoring column for aircraft kills. The squadron then began making regular runs against the enemy airfields and installations in Japan and continued pounding the enemy until 15 August when hostilities ceased. The Red Devils flew antisubmarine patrol and

convoy missions until departing for the United States on 31 October.

During its participation in operations throughout the Pacific, VMTB-232 lost 49 men and 17 aircraft, of which 29 Marines and 8 aircraft were directly attributable to enemy action. On 16 November, the squadron—one of the few to earn two Presidential Unit Citations—arrived at NAS San Diego, was decommissioned, and the Red Devil insignia was shelved. But it would be only a temporary interruption.

Reactivation

The Red Devils were reactivated in the Marine Corps Reserve as Marine Fighter Squadron 232 (VMF-232) on 3 June 1948 at Naval Air Station New York at Floyd Bennett Field, once more becoming a fighter squadron after a 15-year lapse. In July 1949, the 41 officers and 113 enlisted men of VMF-232, under the command of Captain



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

The single-seat Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat fighter was equipped with a 2,000-horsepower engine and could reach speeds of more than 400 mph.

Thomas S. Ferdinand, participated in Reserve training at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina. All flying at this time had to be done in aircraft belonging to other squadrons, because it was not until the unit returned to New York that it began receiving Grumman F6F-5 Hellcats. The fighter was armed with six .50-caliber machine guns (three in each wing) and could carry two 5-inch rocket pods with either two 1,000-pound bombs or external fuel tanks. The aircraft, credited with downing 5,155 Japanese planes, could climb at a rate of 3,000 feet per minute and had a service ceiling of 37,000 feet.¹⁴

For the next year, the squadron's efforts were directed toward building the unit into a combat-ready force. As a result of these efforts, VMF-232 won the Willard "Jesse" Reed Trophy for 1949. This award was presented annually to the squadron at Floyd Bennett Field that had the highest scores throughout the year for attendance, aircraft availability, maneuver performance, inspec-

tions, and rifle and pistol competition. Until the middle of September 1950, VMF-232 remained in Reserve status, conducting organized drills one weekend each month, in addition to an annual two-week summer training maneuver.

On 18 September 1950, after the outbreak of the Korean War, VMF-232 was alerted for active duty and 12 days later was ordered to MAG-15, 3d MAW, at MCAS El Toro. The squadron was airlifted and arrived at its new duty station on 1 October. Eight days later, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Gray assumed command of the Red Devils. On 14 October, the squadron received the first delivery of nine Chance Vought F4U-4B Corsairs. This single-seat fighter had a turbo-supercharged 2,400-horsepower engine—about 400-horsepower more than the previous models—and was used by several land- and carrier-based squadrons. The F4U-4B had four 20mm cannons (two in each wing) and could be armed with two 1,000-pound bombs or eight 5-inch,



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

VMF-232 received its first Chance Vought F4U-4 Corsair on 14 October 1950.

air-to-ground rockets. This fighter could reach speeds in excess of 450 miles per hour, climb at 4,800 feet per minute, and had a service ceiling of 41,400 feet.¹⁵

Intensive training soon began in air-to-air gunnery, strafing, dive, glide, low-level bombing, rocket firing, close air support, night familiarization, instruments, tactics, and navigation. Several squadron members also received instruction in air intelligence, air spotting, and chemical warfare.

On 9 December, all pilots, aircraft, and necessary enlisted personnel departed for the Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) El Centro, California, for field carrier landing practice. The following week the squadron flew to Pensacola, Florida, where the Red Devils joined the pilots of VMF-235 for carrier qualifications on board the light fleet aircraft carrier USS *Wright* (CVL 49). On 23 December 1950, VMF-232 returned to MCAS El Toro.

During the first six months of 1951, the unit participated in extensive specialized problems, exercises, and training. By the latter part of April,

nearly all the original aviators and 40 percent of the enlisted Marines in the squadron had been detached and were sent overseas in various drafts of Air Fleet Marine Force Pacific. In May, the possibility of deployment on board a carrier off Korea caused all squadron activities to be directed toward this type of duty. Consequently, all aviators either qualified or requalified on board the escort carrier USS *Rendova* (CVE 114) between 29 May and 2 June 1951. During that period, the VMF-232 pilots made 212 landings with only one accident; a Corsair was damaged when it struck the ship's landing barrier. Then, from 11 to 15 June, the squadron provided air support and combat air patrols during a landing exercise conducted in the San Clemente, California area.

In spite of the fact that 20 more pilots were drafted for combat duty during July, the squadron flew 725 hours during the month. In August, all phases of training were intensified and, in October, the Red Devils flew 1,054 hours, the highest monthly total since the squadron ceased combat operations in 1945.

During November and December 1951, unit training included napalm delivery and night rocket firing. Unfortunately, the training routine was interrupted on 14 December by a fatal mid-air collision involving Captains William Javoronok and Gay Jones. The following month, First Lieutenant William A. Poe nearly became another statistic. While flying low in search of a simulated target in Silver Creek Canyon, approximately eight miles from Pickel Meadows, California, he found himself hemmed in on three sides by mountain peaks thousands of feet high. Unable to reverse course, he tried to climb over an 11,000-foot-high ridge directly ahead. While nearly stalled, the plane struck the ridge about 20 feet from the top. The aircraft was destroyed, but Lieutenant Poe escaped uninjured.¹⁶

For the first half of 1952, VMF-232 remained at MCAS El Toro conducting training. In February and March, the squadron flew both day and night missions in support of 3d Marine Division training at Camp Pendleton. During April and May, 29 pilots and 94 enlisted men went to NAAS El Centro for ordnance training preparatory to being transferred overseas.

On 27 August 1952, flight operations were secured and the unit's Corsairs were ferried to the overhaul and repair facility to be readied for a shipboard voyage to Hawaii. A week later, the squadron's personnel and equipment were airlifted to NAS Alameda, California, where they were loaded on board the attack transport USS *President Jackson* (APA 18). The Red Devils arrived at Pearl Harbor on 9 September 1952 and reported to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, where they were assigned to MAG-13 for six months temporary duty. Six days later, flight operations began. The first scheduled training was four days of carrier landings on board the attack carrier USS *Oriskany* (CV 34). The normal routine was interrupted briefly in September when Captain Howard W. Ligon's Corsair caught fire during flight. Unable to extinguish the blaze, Captain Ligon was forced to bail out over the ocean. Within five minutes

after landing offshore from Kaneohe Bay, a fishing boat picked up the uninjured pilot and returned him to shore.

The Jet Age

In March 1953, VMF-232 was homeward bound. It departed MCAS Kaneohe Bay on 5 March and arrived at MCAS El Toro six days later. During that month, the Red Devils received their first jet fighters, the Grumman F9F-2 Panther. The changeover from Corsairs to the single-seat F9F with its 5,750-pound thrust Pratt & Whitney engine virtually halted all flight operations. During most of April, 10 Panthers were on hand, but availability was low because of inexperienced crews as well as a paucity of spare parts. However, by the end of the month, 90 percent of the pilots had received familiarization flights, and a two-week course of instruction for mechanics contributed to the maintenance effort. In July, just when things seemed to be going well for the squadron, misfortune plagued the unit. On the 13th, Second Lieutenant John J. Dipasqua was killed when his aircraft crashed on takeoff. Additionally, nine F9F-2s were grounded for maintenance during the first 20 days of July, which greatly reduced the training effort.¹⁷

August 1953 was spent preparing for the Red Devils' second six-month tour at MCAS Kaneohe Bay. On the 14th, an advance echelon composed of 3 officers and 20 enlisted men left for Hawaii. The remainder of the squadron departed NAS San Diego on 21 September. Effective 4 January 1954, homeport for VMF-232 was changed from MCAS El Toro to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, where the unit was assigned to MAG-13.

The squadron's F9F-2s were replaced with Grumman F9F-5 Panther jets, which provided an additional 500 pounds of thrust. This jet was followed by the North American FJ-2 Fury, a swept-wing, carrier-capable fighter that first arrived in the Marine Corps inventory in 1954. Cono R. Borrelli, who was assigned to



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

VMF-232 received its first jet fighter, the Grumman F9F-2 Panther, in 1953. The plane had a Pratt & Whitney engine, which produced 5,750 pounds of thrust and enabled the Panther to reach speeds up to 650 mph. This is an early F9F-2 prototype and did not have the wing-tip tanks common on later production models.

the VMFA-232 from 1954 to 1955 as a second lieutenant and Fury pilot, related that “Granted, the [North American] FJ-2 [Fury] was only in the Marine Corps inventory for a few years, but it was actually the first aircraft flown by Marine squadrons that would exceed Mach 1. We were the first supersonic Marines. On our fourth and final familiarization flight in the FJ-2, we flew through Mach 1 and when we landed were given our ‘mach busters’ lapel pin by the North American technical representatives.”¹⁸

The Red Devils remained in Hawaii for the next eight years, the only excursion from the islands being a cruise to the Western Pacific. The squadron departed Hawaii on 8 September 1958 and deployed to NAS Atsugi, Japan,* where the unit was on board the aircraft carrier USS *Bennington* (CVS 20) from 17 September to 15 November. While deployed on board the carrier, the squadron participated in operations in the Gulf of Taiwan during the Communist bombardment



Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

VMFA-232 flew the FJ-2 Fury, made by North American, from MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, in the mid-1950s.

of Quemoy (or Kinmen) and Matsu Islands. The Red Devils flew combat air patrol missions as directed by U.S. Command, Taiwan Defense Command until relieved by VMF-451. The unit returned to NAF Atsugi, where it remained until it departed for MCAS Kaneohe Bay on 15 March 1959.¹⁹

*NAS Atsugi became Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi in 1971.



Photo courtesy of VMFA-232

A VMF-232 F-8 Crusader made by Chance Vought sits on the flight deck of the USS Oriskany (CV 34) in 1962 during a Western Pacific cruise.

In early 1962, the squadron transitioned from the FJ-4 to the new Chance Vought F8U-2N Crusader, later redesignated the F-8D. While both the Fury and the Crusader were single-engine, swept-wing fighters, the 16,000-pound thrust engine with afterburner of the F-8D far exceeded the performance capabilities of the Fury with its 7,800-pound thrust engine. Although both aircraft were equipped with four 20mm cannons, the Crusader could carry four Sidewinder, heat-seeking, air-to-air missiles while the FJ-4 could only carry two. Additionally, the improved radar and autopilot system of the Crusader enabled it to perform as an all-weather interceptor.²⁰

On 12 June 1962, VMF-232 embarked on board the *Oriskany* and operational control of the squadron shifted to Carrier Air Group 16 (CAG-16). The carrier departed Pearl Harbor on 25 June and arrived in the Philippines on 8 July. While at NAS Cubi Point, Philippines, an F-8D

was lost when the engine flamed out during a test flight. The pilot safely ejected, and the squadron completed the cruise without further accidents.²¹

In July, because of the tension between the Netherlands and Indonesia, the carrier steamed toward New Guinea. The alert was canceled, however, and the ship resumed its normal schedule. The carrier then conducted anti-air warfare exercises during which the squadron flew numerous combat air patrol missions. The *Oriskany* developed mechanical difficulties, and for five weeks the squadron operated from NAS Atsugi while the ship underwent repairs.²²

After additional in-port time at U.S. Naval Base Subic Bay, Philippines, in October and November, the carrier departed for Hawaii arriving on 11 December 1962. The Red Devils were then assigned to MAG-13, 1st Marine Brigade, where they remained for the next four years.

Combat and the Far East

On 1 March 1965, VMF-232 became Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 232 (VMF(AW)-232). As a result of the intensification of operations in Southeast Asia, the squadron left Hawaii for MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, arriving there on 2 September 1966, a year and a half after the first fixed-wing squadrons had been committed to combat operations in Vietnam. During the next two months, the unit, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas M. Trapnell Jr., moved in increments to Da Nang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN). By December, the last of the Red Devils had arrived at Da Nang and the squadron was assigned to MAG-11.

The squadron, flying the newer F-8E Crusader which it received in August 1966, began full combat operations in December. The F-8E was similar to the F-8D but with higher-performance radar which, being mounted in the nose section, changed the appearance slightly. By the end of the month, VMF(AW)-232 had flown 571 sorties while delivering 418 tons of ordnance to enemy targets; four aircraft had received hits, and the Red Devil pilots had become familiar with the I and II Corps area as well as portions of the area north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

During the first four months of 1967, 19 more F-8Es were hit. In most cases, the damage was caused by a single small-arms round and was easily repaired. Most importantly, no pilots were injured. But in May and June, the Red Devils were not quite as fortunate. On 4 May, Major Edward F. Townley's jet was hit as it circled over a suspected enemy position. Soon the fighter was heading seaward trailing fire and smoke. Major Townley ejected and was recovered uninjured.²³ On the 19th, the first Red Devil was killed in action and the squadron lost its second aircraft. While flying a direct air support mission, Captain Harold J. Hellbach reported receiving fire over the target area. As the pilot turned toward the sea, the jet suddenly pitched nose up and



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

On 1 March 1965, VMF-232, which was assigned the F-8E Crusader all-weather interceptor, became Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 232.

then entered a dive, exploding when it hit the ground about six miles from the target area.²⁴ On 21 June, Major Charles L. Cronkrite, who transferred from 232 to the group staff and continued flying with the Red Devils, was killed. After experiencing mechanical difficulties, Major Cronkrite ejected and "it was suspected that the pilot was unconscious when he hit the water." July was a better month in that no one was killed or injured, but one aircraft was lost on the 2d when Major Bruce A. Martin ejected after his plane was hit. Two other F-8s were destroyed on 15 July as the result of an enemy rocket attack on Da Nang. August marked the last month of the unit's combat tour, and on the 30th, when the last plane landed, the Red Devils had amassed totals of 5,785 sorties, 7,273 flight hours, and 6,271 tons of ordnance expended.

Under the leadership of Major Melvin H. Sautter, the final preparations were made for the trans-Pacific flight to MCAS El Toro. The squadron, upon arrival in California on 1 September 1967, was assigned to MAG-33 and Major Norbert F. Schnippel Jr. became the commanding officer. After transferring most of the squadron veterans and joining several new personnel, the unit began rebuilding. On 8 September, VMF(AW)-232 was redesignated Marine Fighter



Photo by SSgt Dub Allen, official U.S. Marine Corps photo

A VMFA-232 F-4J jet sits outside the Red Devils' maintenance hangar at Nam Phong Airbase, also known as the "Rose Garden."

Attack Squadron 232 (VMFA-232). The rejuvenated squadron began receiving McDonnell F-4J Phantom II aircraft on 19 September and immediately began intensive training in preparation for its return to Vietnam. The Phantom, designated primarily as a fighter/interceptor, also possessed a full ground attack capability. It required the addition of another crew member, a naval flight officer who was employed as a radar intercept officer (RIO). The Phantom, with its two 17,000-pound thrust engines, was capable of flying at twice the speed of sound and could carry approximately 16,000 pounds of ordnance.²⁵

From a modest beginning of 13 hours flown in October, the squadron flew 83 hours in November and 188 hours in December. From January 1968 to March 1969, the Red Devils conducted training at MCAS El Toro; MCAS Yuma, Arizona; and NAAS Fallon, Nevada. After an operational readiness inspection held the first week

in March, the Red Devils were prepared for the return flight to Vietnam. On 17 March 1969, the advance party left for Chu Lai, Vietnam, and arrived two days later. The main body departed El Toro on 25 March and arrived on 27 March. The flight transit of the Pacific for the squadron's 15 aircraft plus 3 Navy F-4J's started on 20 March. En route stops were made at Kaneohe Bay, Wake Island, Guam, and Cubi Point. By 31 March, the last of the squadron's aircraft arrived at Chu Lai.

For the next five months, VMFA-232 supported Marine operations in Vietnam as part of MAG-13. During that tour, two aircraft were lost, but none of the crew members were injured. The squadron accumulated more than 3,000 combat sorties and flew nearly 3,600 combat hours. On 4 September 1969, the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph J. Sorensen, led a two-plane flight on the unit's last combat mission. Three days later, VMFA-232 redeployed

to MCAS Iwakuni and was assigned to MAG-15, 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (9th MAB). On 8 November, the squadron was reassigned to the 1st MAW, retaining its assignment to MAG-15.

With the exception of training deployments to Naha Airbase, Okinawa, and NAS Cubi Point, the squadron remained with MAG-15 in Japan until April 1972. On 5 April, the 1st MAW received a warning order from Fleet Marine Force Pacific to be prepared to deploy two fixed-wing tactical aircraft squadrons to Vietnam.* The decision was made to deploy two F-4 units, VMFA-115 and VMFA-232, based at MCAS Iwakuni. On the morning of 6 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued an execute order for the two squadrons and by noon the first flights were airborne. While en route, an operational mishap resulted in the loss of a Red Devil plane. Both the pilot, First Lieutenant Jeffrey F. Weed, and the RIO, Captain Elber A. Highers Jr., were killed. The total time required for the deployment of MAG-15 (Fwd) with 12 F-4Bs from VMFA-115, 15 F-4Js from VMFA-232, and support elements from Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 15 and Marine Air Base Squadron 15 was two days. The rapid response of Marine aviation units was noted by all levels of command, including the president of the United States.²⁶

Due to the temporary status of the Marine forces in Vietnam, "COMSEVENTHFLT [Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet] directed that operational control of MAG-15 (Fwd) be retained by the 1st MAW, with missions assigned by ComUSMACV [Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] air component commander (Seventh Air Force) through the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing located at Da Nang."²⁷ On 9 April, after all crews had received a

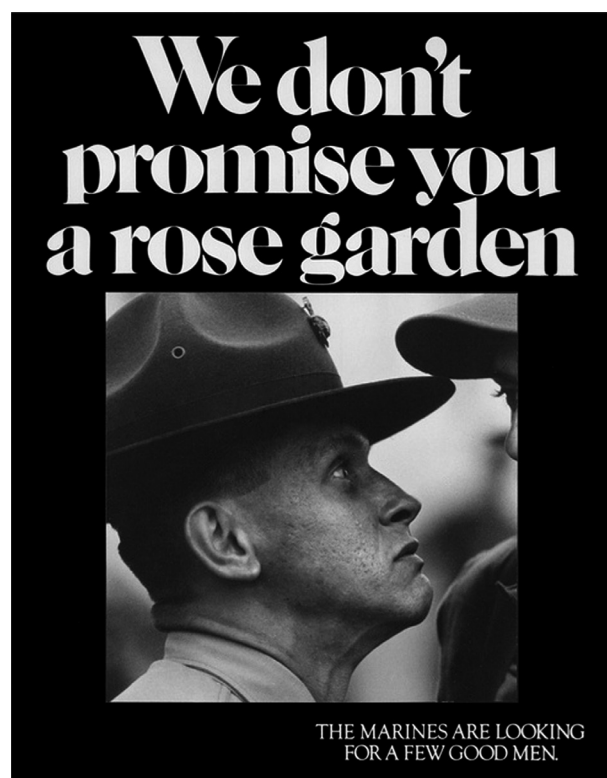
*In 1969, the Marine Corps began reducing its strength in Vietnam and, in June 1971, the last Marine tactical aircraft squadron was redeployed to Japan. The return of Marine air to Vietnam came in response to the Easter Offensive in 1972.



Photo by SSgt Dub Allen, courtesy of Capt John F. Luhmann
An F-4 Phantom loaded with bombs and flown by Capt John F. Luhmann with RIO 1stLt Sherman A. Poling takes fuel from a Marine Lockheed KC-130 Hercules tanker while on a mission out of Nam Phong Air Base, Thailand, in November 1972.

briefing from the U.S. Air Force, the Red Devils' commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Joe L. Gregorcyk, led the first Marine combat mission.

On 20 June, MAG-15 (Fwd) moved to the Royal Thai Air Base, Nam Phong, Thailand, which became known to all Marines as the "Rose Garden." The Red Devils immediately began flight operations supporting South Vietnamese ground forces in the northern and central parts of RVN, as well as flying missions into Laos and North Vietnam.²⁸ Between 2 August and 30 November 1972, VMFA-232 lost three Phantoms and two crew members. One pilot, First Lieutenant Sam G. Cordova, was lost in North Vietnam and a RIO, Captain Donald C. Breuer, was lost in Laos. Both officers were listed as missing in action, but Breuer has since been declared as killed in action. For the next 11 months, the squadron operated without the loss of an aircraft or a crew member. Finally, on 1 September 1973, the squadron's third combat tour in Southeast Asia ended.



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo
Marines based at Nam Phong Air Base nicknamed it the Rose Garden based on the Marine recruiting poster shown here. The austere and often surreal conditions at the base inspired the moniker.

On 1 September 1973, the last Red Devil left Nam Phong and the Indochina War and made NAS Cubi Point, Philippines, its home for the next two-and-a-half months. While at Cubi Point, VMFA-232 took part in a missile exercise conducted to qualify air crewmen with the Sparrow and Sidewinder missiles. From 13 to 20 November, the squadron moved 209 short tons of equipment in C-130 aircraft and established itself at MCAS Iwakuni.

For VMFA-232, success or achievement was no longer measured in terms of bomb damage assessments, targets destroyed, and 100-mission crew members, but rather in readiness, training posture, and inspection results. By the end of June 1974, the squadron was ready to settle down to the routine of peacetime flying, but not before accepting the Robert M. Hanson Award

for fiscal year 1974, which distinguished the unit as the most outstanding fighter squadron in the Marine Corps. During the period for which the squadron won the award, it was under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel James M. Mead and then-Major Frederick J. Schober.

Phantoms Fight the Cold War

On 1 September 1975, VMFA-232 celebrated its 50th birthday.* Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Daniels, the Red Devils remained in the Western Pacific, flying from MCAS Iwakuni as a 1st MAW squadron until October 1977. Then, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Frank J. Horak Jr., the squadron moved to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and became part of MAG-24. This marked the first time the squadron had been based in the United States since 1969. A large turnover in personnel occurred as Marines left the squadron for other assignments and new Marines joined. Shortly afterward, VMFA-232 pilots flew the squadron's McDonnell Douglas F-4J Phantom II aircraft to NAS North Island, California, to replace them with an improved variant of the F-4J fitted with smokeless engines. VMFA-232 continued to fly Phantoms from MCAS Kaneohe Bay until 1989.

The Red Devils conducted a spectrum of training missions in Hawaii, which was an excellent place for building combat skills. There were restricted areas or “working areas” for air-to-air training just off the coast where the Phantom crews could “go tactical” within minutes of takeoff. Here they practiced air-to-air intercepts under the control and direction of Marine Air Control Squadron 2. They also often practiced air combat maneuvering, or dogfighting, with other Hawaii-based tactical jet units, such as those of the Hawaii Air National Guard, the

*Unless otherwise noted, information comes from the squadron command chronologies archived at the Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA.



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

A row of McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantoms sit on the runway at MCAS Kaneohe Bay. The Red Devils first flew Phantoms in September 1967.

U.S. Air Force, or the U.S. Navy, and with units temporarily deployed to Hawaii, such as carrier-deployed U.S. Navy Grumman F-14 Tomcat fighter squadrons. MAG-24 and the 3d Marine Regiment were organic units of the 1st Marine Brigade. This made Kaneohe Bay the only Marine Corps base where air and ground units were jointly based and under a common commander. This embodied the air-ground team concept and facilitated air-ground training and an air-ground cultural mix. Air-to-ground training was conducted at the Army's Pohakuloa Training Area on the island of Hawaii, which included close air support training for 3d Marine units. Additionally, live missile shoots were conducted off the coast of Oahu under the guidance and control of the Navy's Pacific Missile Range Facility at Barking Sands, on the island of Kauai.

Within a year of returning to Hawaii, VMFA-232 was back in the Western Pacific. This time for

only six months as part of the unit deployment program (UDP), a rotational system the Marine Corps had recently instituted. While deployed to the Western Pacific, the squadron was based at MCAS Iwakuni and temporarily became a part of the 1st MAW. For the next eight years, VMFA-232, while flying the F-4 Phantom, executed six UDPs, rotating to the Western Pacific for six months with a year at Kaneohe Bay in between. Valuable training and a demanding operational environment was part of each Western Pacific deployment.

The trans-Pacific flight required to reach Japan had to be carefully planned and choreographed in conjunction with support agencies, such as Marine or Air Force refueling squadrons, and normally required three days to complete. To make the flight, squadrons normally divided their complement of aircraft into two six-plane cells, with the second cell taking off approxi-



Photo courtesy of VMFA-232

A Red Devil F-4J sits on the ramp at NAS Cubi Point, Philippines, in 1975. The squadron made regular deployments to Cubi Point after the Vietnam War and while it participated in the unit deployment program as a Phantom squadron from 1978 to 1986.

mately within an hour of the first. The first day's flight from Hawaii would end at Wake Island or, occasionally, Midway Island. The second day the squadron flew to Guam, and the final day the squadron flew to MCAS Iwakuni.

Once settled in MCAS Iwakuni, a typical UDP deployment included operational training at various locations in the Western Pacific, including South Korea, Okinawa, and the Philippines. One particularly demanding but beneficial exercise was Cope Thunder, a U.S. Air Force-administered, air-to-air exercise in the Philippine Islands. In Cope Thunder, fighter crews engaged in aerial combat against fighter aircraft of the Air Force or Navy in a variety of real-world type scenarios. Team Spirit, a multiservice/multinational amphibious exercise in South Korea was another demanding exercise. Marine squadrons deployed to Yechon Air Base, South Korea, operating in expeditionary conditions for only a few days or

for as long as two weeks. In Team Spirit exercises, the squadron flew a gamut of missions: air-to-air sorties in the air defense role and ground attack sorties providing close air support for Coalition ground forces. The training in the Western Pacific was robust and challenging for everyone involved, including aircrews and the squadron Marines who maintained the jets and performed the behind-the-scenes tasks required to meet the demanding flight schedule.

Deployments to the U.S. mainland during the squadron's year "at home" between Western Pacific deployments added another layer of realistic training. MCAS Yuma in Arizona was usually home base during these deployments. The squadron availed itself of the facilities, ranges, and working areas around Yuma for air-to-ground sorties, air-to-air sorties, and low-level training. One especially helpful facility was the air combat maneuvering range. Its state-of-the-art display provided



Photo by Fred H. Allison

A Marine F-4J Phantom turns belly up over the patchwork farmland near MCAS Yuma, Arizona, ca. 1979. The training ranges around Yuma proved to be an excellent site for tactical aviation training for VMFA-232.

a digital readout of the flight paths and weapons employment for each aircraft in the fight. This took the guesswork out of mission debriefings. While in the United States, the squadron also participated in electronic warfare training on the Echo Range at China Lake, California. The squadron's mainland U.S. deployment was often topped off by flying in the Air Force's dynamic Red Flag air combat exercise conducted out of Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada.

Throughout the years, individual members of the Red Devils gained graduate-level air tactics instruction as they worked through the Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1 syllabus to become air combat tactics instructors or weapons and tactics instructors. Selected pilots and RIOs also attended the Naval Fighter Weap-

ons School program (popularly known as "Top Gun") for advanced air combat training at NAS Miramar, San Diego, California.*

VMFA-232 maintained an excellent record of safe flying. By mid-1979, VMFA-232 had flown more than five years without a major accident. This record ended, however, on 23 November 1979 when the F-4 Phantom piloted by First Lieutenant Stephen C. Hastings and RIO Captain Steven R. Sammet crashed into the ocean near San Diego, resulting in the loss of both crewmen and the aircraft.

Although the Marine Corps' new fighter, the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18A Hornet, entered

*In 1996, Top Gun merged with the Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor Program that was established at NAS Fallon, Nevada.



Photo by MSgt Jim Varhegyi, USAF,
courtesy of Defense Imagery

Gen William L. Nyland, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps in 2002–5, testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2004. As a lieutenant colonel, Nyland commanded VMFA-232 from 1985 to 1987.

service in 1983, the Red Devils continued to fly the F-4 throughout the 1980s. The last Phantom II UDP for the Red Devils occurred from April to October 1986 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William L. Nyland.* Highlights of this deployment included participation

*Nyland was the first Marine naval flight officer to obtain the rank of general. After serving in a number of squadron and staff assignments and command of VMFA-232, in July 1990 he assumed command of Marine Aviation Training Support Group 21 in Pensacola, Florida. Nyland advanced to the rank of major general on 2 July 1997 and assumed duties as the deputy commanding general of II Marine Expeditionary Force. He then commanded 2d MAW from July 1998 to June 2000. After advancement to lieutenant general, he became the deputy commandant for programs and resources at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps followed by assignment as deputy commandant for aviation. He was promoted to general on 4 September 2002 and assumed duties as the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps on 10 September 2002. He retired from active duty on 1 November 2005.

in a Cope Thunder exercise, supporting a Boeing B-52 Stratofortress minelaying exercise, and conducting air-to-air combat training against Air Force McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagles at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa. After returning to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Nyland turned the squadron over to his friend, Lieutenant Colonel George C. Tullos, in a change of command ceremony on 2 July 1987. In October, Tullos led the squadron on its final F-4 deployment to the mainland. For one last time, aircrews put the Phantom through its paces in training at Yuma, El Toro, and Red Flag. At Red Flag, VMFA-232 played the unusual role—for Marines—of being the blue force (friendly) bombers for the exercise. On 28 November 1988, the last VMFA-232 F-4S Phantom II was transferred to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia, where it remains on display.

In early 1989, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Victor A. Simpson, the squadron began the transition to the F/A-18. Pilots went to Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 101 to learn to fly the Hornet, and maintenance Marines went to NAS Lemoore, California, to learn to repair it. The F/A-18's fly-by-wire, digital radar and weapons system and tremendous maneuvering capabilities were awe-inspiring to pilots, and maintenance troops were amazed at the Hornet's reliability and ease of maintenance. By 12 June 1989, the Red Devils had a full complement of 12 Hornets and, in April 1990, the squadron flew a record number of hours for an F/A-18 squadron: 870.2 hours. They would not have to wait long to employ their new aircraft in actual combat.

Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm

With Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the Red Devils began to prepare for war. In De-



Photo by Sgt Jeff Wright, courtesy of Defense Imagery

A McDonnell Douglas F/A-18C Hornet strike fighter of VMFA-232 taxis on a runway before takeoff for a mission in support of Operation Desert Storm.

ember, they were ordered to deploy to Bahrain and join MAG-11, 3d MAW, in support of Operation Desert Shield. On 10 December, Lieutenant Colonel Simpson and VMFA-232 departed MCAS Kaneohe Bay and headed east, bound for the Persian Gulf. The squadron arrived at Shaikh Isa Air Base in Bahrain six days later, and four days after that they began flying combat air patrols (CAPs) over the northern Persian Gulf. These day-and-night CAPs continued until the onset of Operation Desert Storm, which began on 17 January 1991 with massive Coalition air strikes.

The Red Devils had aircraft in all five waves of the first day's strikes. Leading from the front, Lieutenant Colonel Simpson flew in the first mission, which launched shortly after midnight. On his wing was Captain Donald A. Ulsh. Their mission was suppression of the Iraqi electronic air de-

fense system in order to protect a 30-plane strike on Shaibah Air Base near Basrah, Iraq. Throughout this mission, pilots aggressively "yanked and banked" their aircraft to avoid antiaircraft fire consisting of both artillery and surface-to-air missiles. Thankfully, the antiaircraft fire was not guided because the Iraqi guidance systems for their antiaircraft weapons had been neutralized by Northrup Grumman EA-6B Prowler electronic warfare aircraft. Near the target, Simpson and Ulsh fired AGM-88 high-speed antiradiation missiles (HARMs) at Roland (a French-made antiaircraft missile) and SA-6 (a Russian-produced antiaircraft missile) sites, which had effectively covered the strike aircraft bombers.

Also participating in the opening strike of the air campaign were a division of VMFA-232 pilots, including Major Robert W. Elflein and his wingman Captain Craig F. Benson and an Air



Photo by TSgt Paul J. Page, USAF, courtesy of Defense Imagery

The Red Devils relocated to Shaikh Isa Air Base in Bahrain in December 1990 to support Operation Desert Storm.

Force exchange pilot, Major Joseph Sokol Jr., and his wingman, Captain Alan W. Kubiak. To protect strike aircraft, this division flew a MIG sweep and air defense suppression mission, during which they fired HARMs at Soviet-made SA-3 surface-to-air missile sites near Tallil in Iraq. Later that first day, Major John D. Dewitt Jr. served as mission commander for a short-notice, add-on mission. It included a 22-plane strike package on SA-2 (a Russian-made anti-aircraft missile) sites. Dewitt's division included Captains William J. Harkin, Gerald R. Temple, and John T. Powell Jr. This mission was flown in challenging weather and faced heavy anti-aircraft fire, including SA-6 launches. Despite these challenges, this mission was a success according to the unit's command chronology: "By the end of day one, all Red Devil pilots were 'combat veterans' having delivered ordnance on the enemy and survived the enemy's anti-aircraft fire."²⁹

For the next month, the squadron flew around-the-clock combat missions as part of Operation Desert Storm. The Red Devils flew strikes into Iraq on strategic targets, as well as strikes targeting the Iraqi military in Kuwait. The latter were particularly important for shaping the battlefield on which the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) would eventually fight. Targets hit by Red Devil pilots included hangars at Shaibah Air Base, command and control centers at Tallil, train yards and a refinery at al-Bashar, a train yard at al-Zubayr, and an ammunition storage facility south of Kuwait International Airport. The direct hit on the latter target produced massive secondary explosions estimated to be in the 1.8-megaton range.

In late January, the Red Devils focused on striking Iraq's elite *Republican Guard Hammurabi* and *Medina Armored Divisions*.³⁰ From 17 January to the end of the month, VMFA-232 pi-



Photo by PH2 John Gay, USN, courtesy of Defense Imagery

A ground crew member steps down from the cockpit of a VMFA-232 F/A-18C Hornet aircraft after conducting a preflight check during Tandem Thrust 93 in Guam.

lots flew 224 combat sorties in 456 hours, dropping 42 MK84 2,000-pound bombs, 169 MK83 1,000-pound bombs, 25 MK82 500-pound bombs and 80 MK20 Rockeye cluster bombs and firing 48 HARMs. Once the ground war commenced on 24 February, the Red Devils provided both close and deep air support for Marine battalions. While Red Devil pilots hammered the enemy, Red Devil ground crews and maintenance personnel ensured that aircraft were available, with the squadron averaging a 90 percent full-mission capable status through January 1991.^{31*}

With the war's end, VMFA-232 returned to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, retracing their flight to war with overnight stops at Rota, Spain; MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina; and MCAS El Toro. Families waited on the flight line as the Red

Devils' Hornets pulled onto the VMFA-232 ramp and squadron Marines debarked from transport aircraft.

F/A-18 Hornet Peacetime Training

After Operation Desert Storm, the squadron resumed peacetime tactical training that included routine Western Pacific deployments. In February 1993, the Red Devils were once again deployed to the Pacific. Although similar to previous Western Pacific deployments, this one included the new training destinations of Guam and Thailand, which were necessitated by the return of American facilities in the Philippines to the Filipino government in 1992. In Guam, VMFA-232 participated in joint exercise Tandem Thrust. From Guam, they flew to Utapao, Thailand,

*This means that 90 percent of the squadron's aircraft were available to fly with all systems working.

where the Red Devils flew in a joint air-ground exercise with U.S. Air Force Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt units, supporting an amphibious assault conducted by U.S. and Thai Marines. Afterward, VMFA-232 flew to Korat, Thailand, for participation in the Cope Tiger 93 exercise. Cope Tiger sorties included close air support and air-to-air combat as part of a large joint air force that included Thai and U.S. Air Force aircraft. Training in Guam and Thailand aptly compensated for the loss of Philippine-based training. By May 1993, VMFA-232 reached an important safety milestone: flying 50,000 hours over 13 years without a major accident.

After returning to MCAS Kaneohe Bay in early August 1993, VMFA-232 experienced a major relocation to MCAS El Toro and became part of MAG-11. In a sense, it was a return home, as VMFA-232 had been based at El Toro 26 years earlier. Basing at MCAS El Toro gave the squadron easy access to the training ranges nearby, such as those near NAF El Centro and the Marine Corps bases at Twentynine Palms, California, and Yuma, Arizona. Within weeks, the Red Devils participated in a MAG-11 bombing competition at Hill Air Force Base in Utah. While at Hill, the unit also practiced special weapons delivery, which included firing AGM-65 Mavericks and AGM-62 Walleyes, both precision air-to-ground missiles. Later, they supported the 11th Marine Regiment with close air support in a live-fire exercise. This was followed with defensive air combat tactics training with a General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon squadron of the Arizona Air National Guard.

In December 1993, the squadron deployed to MCAS Yuma for Operation Scorpion Wind, a sophisticated Marine Air-Ground Task Force exercise that rehearsed close air support tactics and special weapons employment. Scorpion Wind also included air combat against Marine McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harriers and Northrop F-5 Tiger IIs from VMFT-401, as well as U.S. Air Force F-15 Eagles and F-16 Fighting Falcons.

One training mission that demonstrated the Hornet's long-range capabilities included an air strike flown in July 1994 from MCAS El Toro to Fort Smith, Arkansas, by a division of VMFA-232 pilots. Led by Captain Gary A. Kling and relying on Marine Lockheed KC-130 Hercules refueling aircraft to cover the 2,000 miles to the target, the Marine pilots successfully conducted the simulated air strike while besting in mock air combat the U.S. Air Force F-16s that defended the target.

Although based at MCAS El Toro, the Red Devils remained part of the UDP rotation. In August 1994, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Knutzen, the squadron deployed once again to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan. The Red Devils commenced an aggressive training schedule, including simulated close air support for 2d Battalion, 3d Marine Regiment, at Camp Fuji, Japan, and participation in a large force exercise in South Korea in conjunction with the U.S. Air Force's 18th Wing. A detachment of Red Devil Marines also deployed to the Japanese air base at Misawa and participated in air-to-air training against U.S. Air Force jets of the 432d Wing. During the Misawa deployment, VMFA-232 provided static aircraft displays for air shows at Tsuiki, MCAS Futenma, and Hyakuri in Japan. They also practiced bombing on the Ripsaw Range north of Misawa. Simultaneously, a detachment of Red Devils deployed to Kadena Air Base where they simulated combat with Air Force F-15s and F-16s of the 18th Wing. During this deployment, Red Devil pilots also engaged in a live-fire missile shoot. In December, a detachment of VMFA-232 Marines and jets operated from Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, in support of Beach Crest 95, a command and control exercise. To support these far-flung exercises meant that squadron Marines and jets were at Iwakuni, Osan, Kadena, and Misawa simultaneously.

The Red Devils returned to MCAS El Toro in February 1995. Awaiting them was yet another major move, this time to MCAS Miramar



Photo by TSgt James E. Lotz, USAF

An F/A-18C Hornet aircraft from VMFA-232 taxis in front of a Republic of Singapore Air Force A-4SU Skyhawk aircraft at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, for a mission in support of Exercise Cope Tiger 02.

on the northern outskirts of San Diego, California. Miramar had begun as a Marine Corps base in World War II, but it became a Navy base in 1947 after the opening of MCAS El Toro. The Marines returned to Miramar after the 1993 Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) decision to close MCAS El Toro. Navy squadrons stationed at the base were moved to NAS Fallon. MCAS Miramar proved to be advantageous for training because civilian air traffic was less dense and it was closer to the working areas to the east. Besides local training, VMFA-232 deployed eight aircraft to Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, where the Red Devils flew in simulated air combat against German F-4 Phantom IIs. Another significant training deployment followed when VMFA-232 flew 10 Hornets and a detachment of Marines to Nellis Air Force Base to support the U.S. Air Force's Fighter Weapons School. In this training, VMFA-232 pilots flew

in large force missions comprising more than 70 aircraft. In Operation Longshot, also conducted at Nellis, the Red Devils played the role of aggressors. As an aggressor pilot, Captain Christopher M. McCarthy defeated three U.S. Air Force F-15s in air combat and made simulated gun runs on a B-52.

In 1995, the squadron placed extra emphasis on night operations with pilots learning to employ night-vision goggles. That same year, VMFA-232 supported an enhanced combined arms exercise at Twentynine Palms during which they dropped 170,000 pounds of ordnance and flew sorties wearing level-four mission-oriented protective posture gear. This was a protective suit to be worn when the threat of chemical, nuclear, or biological attack was high. Pilots essentially had to fly encapsulated in a bulky protective suit. In November, a squadron change of command passed the leadership role to Lieutenant Colonel

Jeffrey L. Olson. With four full squadron deployments, concentrated night tactical flying, and a major relocation, 1995 had been particularly active. The squadron had also successfully completed a Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation and a commanding general's inspection. This was done safely as the Red Devils surpassed 70,000 hours of safe flying. Their safe and high-tempo operational flying were recognized by the receipt of the Chief of Naval Operations Aviation Safety Award for 1995 and the prestigious Robert M. Hanson award for the outstanding Marine fighter attack squadron for 1996.

In February 1996, VMFA-232 departed for another six-month UDP in the Western Pacific. Besides the usual deployments to Korea and Kadena, the Red Devils also trained in Australia for the first time. This followed a deployment to Thailand in April for participation in Cobra Gold, an expansive joint Thai and U.S. exercise. At the conclusion of Cobra Gold, VMFA-232 flew to Darwin, Australia, and flew in Operation Southern Frontier. Australia provided for more aggressive air-to-ground training as the Australian ranges were larger and less restrictive regarding employing live ordnance than those in Japan or Korea. The Red Devils returned to MCAS Miramar in late August.

Throughout the remainder of the 1990s, VMFA-232 continued to prepare for combat using realistic training in the United States as well as the Western Pacific. They also trained safely as indicated by the squadron's receipt of the Chief of Naval Operations Aviation Safety Award five times between 1995 and 2000. At the time, they did not realize that this training was preparing Red Devil aviators and troops for a decade of conflict that would break out when terrorists flew commercial airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Another attack using a third airliner was diverted away from its target by heroic passengers but resulted in the airliner crashing into the Pennsylvania countryside.

Onset of the Global War on Terrorism and Operation Iraqi Freedom I

On 7 and 8 September 2001, VMFA-232 departed MCAS Miramar bound for MCAS Iwakuni for what was to be another routine Western Pacific deployment. While in transit, the terrorist attacks in New York City, Pennsylvania, and on the Pentagon occurred. The deployment was halted temporarily at Wake Island until plans were developed in light of the heightened threat of global terrorism. The Red Devils would play an active part in Operation Noble Eagle, the defense of the homeland, which included U.S.-friendly states, nations, and territories in the Pacific. Upon reaching MCAS Iwakuni, the Red Devils, now under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Edward G. Hackett, redeployed immediately to Guam. Once there, VMFA-232 flew 24-hour combat air patrols with their F/A-18s loaded with live weapons. The Red Devils also executed 1st MAW's theater engagement plan, which again was the protection of friendly nations in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. This required long overwater flights to far-flung locations, including Yap, Palau, the Philippines, Iwo Jima, the Marianas, Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei. In so doing, VMFA-232 logged more than 18,000 miles of open-ocean flying, often without navigational aids. During this demanding Western Pacific deployment, VMFA-232 passed the 90,000-hour safe flying mark. In early February 2002, the squadron returned to MCAS Iwakuni from Guam, but not before they participated in another Cope Tiger exercise in Thailand. In mid-March 2002, the Red Devils returned home to MCAS Miramar.

With combat operations occurring in Afghanistan and the United States planning a global war on terrorism, training took on increased urgency and significance for the squadron. The focus was now on air-to-ground operations and



Photo by Maj Jonathan E. Curtis, courtesy of LtCol Byron D. Sullivan

VMFA-232 commanding officer LtCol Michael H. Burt flies his F/A-18 Hornet over Baghdad, Iraq, during Operation Iraqi Freedom I.

deep air strikes. New pilots completed the combat wingman syllabus (advanced combat training at the squadron level), while seasoned pilots received advanced training through air combat tactics instructor training or in the Top Gun course that now took place at NAS Fallon. The Red Devils also participated in three combined arms exercises in 2002. Late in 2002, the Red Devils were alerted of a possible wartime deployment to Kuwait for operations against Iraq.

The deployment became official in early January 2003. On 28 January, VMFA-232, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Michael H. Burt, departed MCAS Miramar and flew into Kuwait by way of MCAS Beaufort and Moron, Spain. Arriving at al-Jaber Air Base in Kuwait on 1 Feb-

ruary, squadron pilots soon began flying Operation Southern Watch missions. Southern Watch had been an ongoing operation since the end of Desert Storm. These missions entailed flying over the no-fly portions of Iraq to ensure that there were no Iraqi aircraft operating in these zones and to monitor the Iraqi command and control and antiaircraft defense systems to ensure that they were not being operated. From 8 February to 19 March, the Red Devils flew 197 Operation Southern Watch sorties. Al-Jaber, an air base that many Marine aviators had bombed in Operation Desert Storm, was now home base for Marine fixed-wing aircraft. Living and working facilities were still under construction when VMFA-232 arrived. Marines set up their own tents and



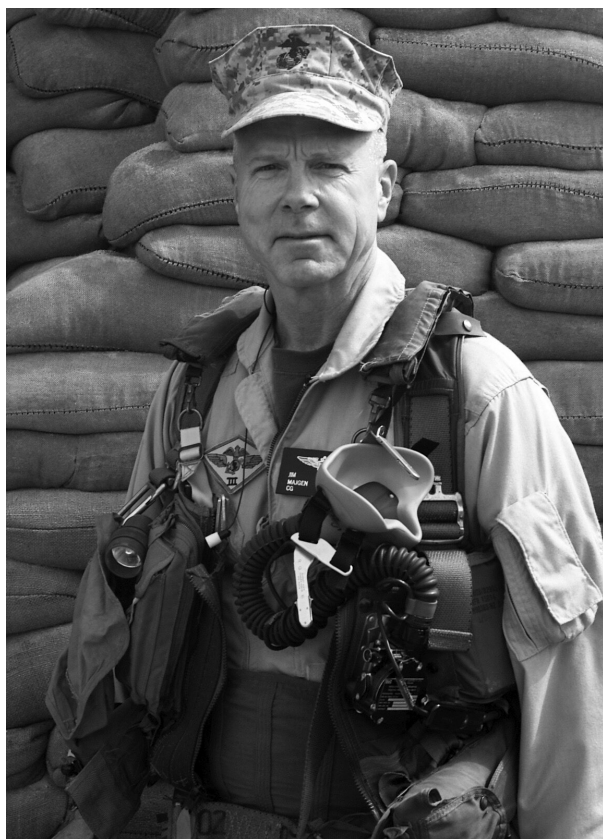
Official U.S. Marine Corps photo, courtesy of Maj Dustin J. Byrum

VMFA-232 Marines gather for a squadron photo in front of a destroyed hangar at al-Jaber Air Base in Kuwait where the squadron was based during Operation Iraqi Freedom I in 2003. The hangar had been bombed during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and never repaired.

scrounged for wood to build furniture. Squadron Marines built a ready room from plywood and boards and appropriately painted the entire thing red.³² In short order, VMFA-232 logistics and supply Marines had provided for a clean, orderly, and well-maintained tent city.

On 20 March 2003, Operation Iraqi Freedom I began. The Red Devils flew in the earliest missions, providing close and deep air support for the advancing infantry columns. Precise close air support was imperative as ground force Marines slugged it out in the urban centers of an-Nasiriyah and Baghdad. The operational tempo was high, and operations went 24 hours a day. Pilots took off, contacted an air controller, and deployed ordnance, usually without delay. In the last 11 days of March alone, VMFA-232 pilots

dropped 200 tons of ordnance and participated in the destruction of the Iraqi 11th, 14th, 18th, and 51st Divisions; the 6th and 10th Armored Divisions; and the Baghdad and al-Nida Divisions of the Republican Guard. This dynamic combat tempo was supported by a maintenance effort that produced combat capable aircraft at a 93.3 percent rate.³³ After the fall of Baghdad on 10 April, the Coalition's emphasis shifted to security and stabilization. A concomitant shift of mission type occurred for tactical aviation. Missions changed from fast-paced air-to-ground strikes to combat air patrols or on-call close air support. Combat operations for the Red Devils ended in late April, and the squadron returned to MCAS Miramar, arriving on 5 May.



Official Department of Defense photo
MajGen James F. Amos commanded 3d MAF during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and 2004. Amos was also a pilot in VMFA-232 in 1973–75.

Carrier Operations with the U.S. Navy

Soon after returning to MCAS Miramar, a radical operational shift occurred for VMFA-232. The Red Devils were notified that they would be assigned to a U.S. Navy carrier air wing as part of the Marine/Navy tactical air integration agreement.* Until carrier workups began, the ongoing war on terrorism shaped training. Increased emphasis was now on night operations, low-altitude training, and ground attack emphasizing preci-

*Originally, 10 Marine F/A-18 squadrons were to be committed to the tactical integration program. As of 2012, this had not occurred due to the changing requirements of the Global War on Terrorism.

sion ordnance delivery, all of which reflected the reality of combat operations. Realistic training was also dangerous. Captain John T. Berger was killed on 22 July 2003 while flying a nighttime close air support training mission at Twentynine Palms.

Training for the upcoming carrier cruise began in May 2004, a year prior to the actual event. In June, a detachment of aircraft and Marines participated at NAS Fallon in the Strike Fighter Advanced Readiness Program. Marines in the Red Devil maintenance department coordinated with their Navy counterparts to meet possibly the most challenging aspect of integrating a Marine squadron into a carrier air wing: conducting aircraft maintenance in the carrier's tight confines and in harmony with its fast-paced and closely timed cyclic operations. On 23 July 2004, Lieutenant Colonel Burt passed the command of VMFA-232 to Lieutenant Colonel Douglas S. Kurth.

It had been 46 years since a Red Devil landed on a carrier when, on 23 August 2004, Major Rhett J. Vranish landed on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72) during VMFA-232's initial at-sea training period. Another training period occurred in November, this time on board the USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68), with Carrier Air Wing 11 (CVW-11).^{*} Following a Thanksgiving break at MCAS Miramar, the squadron spent another at-sea period on the *Nimitz* for a composite training unit exercise, which focused on long-range strikes, day-long close air support events, and sorties in support of the carrier strike group. In an evaluation of mission readiness, conducted by Carrier Group 1, the Red Devils were noted to have performed "magnificently during the evaluation's most difficult phase, surge operations and the final battle problem."³⁴ Carrier workups intensified into 2005 with a CVW-11 deployment to NAS Fallon. A final at-sea period took place

*The USS *Lincoln* had been called to make an emergency surge deployment.



Photo courtesy of Maj Dustin J. Byrum
VMFA-232 officers show off their red party suits during the squadron's traditional Foc'sle Follies party while in Guam during the 2005 cruise aboard the USS Nimitz (CVN 68).

in March for a joint task force exercise. Before the cruise began, officers redesigned the squadron ready room on the *Nimitz* with a Red Devil/Marine Corps motif. This included replacing the floor tile with red and black tile featuring a Red Devil figure in the center and affixing camouflage netting to the ceiling.³⁵ On 7 May, VMFA-232 came under the operational control of CVW-11 and sailed on board the *Nimitz* to the Western Pacific and into the Arabian Sea.

By mid-July 2005, the *Nimitz* had entered the Arabian Gulf. On 15 July 2005, Colonel Kurth led the Red Devils' first mission over Iraq. As the war had devolved into sectarian violence, Coalition forces were involved in counterinsurgency operations, and actual ordnance employment was a rarity. Red Devil pilots nevertheless dealt with enemy threats by making low and fast flyovers, using their jet noise to deter troublemakers. Other missions included armed reconnaissance, counter-mortar operations, and convoy escorts. The flights were long, from four to six hours, which required three aerial refuelings. The heat, which approached 120 degrees Fahrenheit

at times, and high humidity made working conditions brutal for Marines involved in flight deck operations or aircraft maintenance. Nevertheless, Marine maintenance crews ensured that jets were available for combat operations and logged a 95 percent Iraqi Freedom sortie completion rate.

On 21 September, the *Nimitz* turned toward home. Nearing India and departing the U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility (Fifth Fleet) for the Seventh Fleet's area of responsibility, VMFA-232 pilots flew in Operation Malabar. This was a multinational exercise that included military components from India, Japan, Australia, and Singapore. The exercise involved air combat training against Indian Navy, British Aerospace Sea Harrier FRS-51s. Flight operations continued as the *Nimitz* sailed toward Australia. Landing a fighter jet at night was always a challenge, but it was especially challenging on 4 October when surging, storm-tossed waves caused the *Nimitz's* flight deck to pitch approximately 25 feet. Good airmanship, however, ensured that all CVW-11 pilots—the only airborne Red Devil was Captain Justin W. Knox—landed safely. It took more than three hours to recover all the aircraft, an evolution that normally would take 25 minutes, because pilots had to make multiple landing attempts.³⁶

After a four-day shore liberty period in Perth, Australia, the *Nimitz* pressed eastward. Stopping in Hawaii, the squadron embarked their "tigers"—their families and friends—for a "tiger cruise" back to California. On 7 November 2005, the 10 Red Devil F/A-18s roared off the *Nimitz* flight deck and flew into MCAS Miramar.³⁷

With the cruise over, the squadron resumed land-based operational training from MCAS Miramar, anticipating another cruise in about 16 months. The Red Devils once again received the Chief of Naval Operations Aviation Safety Award for 2004. In February 2006, the squadron's 80th anniversary was marked belatedly with a reunion of former members and a series of commemorative activities. Former squadron commander,



Photo courtesy of VMFA-232

VMFA-232 Marines and sailors assemble for a group photo taken 24 October 2005 aboard the Nimitz just weeks before the squadron resumed land-based operational training at MCAS Miramar.

and then-Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Nyland, served as the guest speaker at a formal ball. In March and April, the squadron was detached to MCAS Yuma for six weeks to support weapons and tactics instructor training. In May, Lieutenant Colonel Hunter H. Hobson became the new commanding officer, or “Head Devil.” The squadron also received a “new” complement of aircraft: 12 F/A-18A+ models transferred from various Marine squadrons. These jets were actually some of the oldest Hornets in the Marine Corps inventory, certainly older than the F/A-18Cs that they had just given up. Inspections and maintenance work was conducted systematically and thoroughly to groom the aircraft for future flight operations. In the latter half of 2006, VMFA-232 began carrier workups again for a scheduled cruise commencing in April 2007, once again aboard the *Nimitz* and part of CVW-11.

After getting underway, the ship hastened to the Indian Ocean to support Operation Enduring Freedom. Once on station in the North Arabian Sea, VMFA-232 and CVW-11 began flying combat missions over Afghanistan. Nontraditional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; convoy escort; road reconnaissance; close air support; and show-of-force were typical of the missions flown. The nontraditional reconnaissance mission was facilitated by linking the Hornet’s advanced targeting forward-looking infrared (ATFLIR) pod (this guides precision weapons and provides magnified imagery of ground terrain to pilots) with the ROVER III system used by forward air controllers (FACs). This linkage gave the FAC the same video imagery that the pilot saw, thus ensuring more effective and precise air support. To minimize collateral damage and the chance of a “blue on blue” event (a friendly fire incident), only precision-guided bombs were



Photo by MC 3d Class Eduardo Zaragoza, USN

Assigned to VMFA-232, LCpl Ryan Adair loads a GBU-38 bomb onto an F/A-18B Hornet on the flight deck of the USS Nimitz in the Arabian Gulf on 9 May 2007.

used and/or strafing with the Hornet's 20mm cannon. The missions were long, more than six hours in many cases, and routinely required three aerial refuelings.³⁸ During this period, maintenance Marines kept the squadron's jets flying, challenged by the demands of combat and carrier operations and the advanced age of their jets.^{39*}

Later in the cruise, the *Nimitz* sailed into the Arabian Sea to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. Over Iraq, VMFA-232 supported ground counterinsurgency operations with close air support and reconnaissance escort sorties. In one

especially noteworthy mission, Captains Cedar L. Hinton and Russell G. Gogan dropped two GBU-31* joint direct attack munitions each on preplanned targets.⁴⁰

On 22 July, the *Nimitz* set sail for its home port in California. On the return cruise, CVW-11 participated in the expansive naval exercise Valiant Shield near Guam. Part of this training involved a sinking exercise in which a decommissioned Navy destroyer was the target for bombing practice. Colonel Hobson dropped an MK82 (500-pound) bomb at the ship's waterline that ended the exercise by sending the destroyer to the bottom. This was a big disappointment for the Air Force B-52 crew that had flown from the United States with the specific mission of sinking

*Statistics reveal that squadron maintenance troops invested three-times (56.1 maintenance hours per flight hour) the maintenance man-hours per flight hour than did the typical F/A-18 squadrons in order to meet operational requirements.

*The GBU-31 is a 2,000-pound precision-guided bomb.



Photo by MC Seaman Jake Berenguer, USN

U.S. Navy sailors direct an F/A-18A Hornet assigned to VMFA-232 on the flight deck of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz in the Indian Ocean on 15 May 2007.

the ship. The *Nimitz* then sailed to India to support Exercise Malabar, the first one held outside the Indian Ocean, before turning toward home. VMFA-232 finally arrived back at MCAS Miramar on 29 October 2007.

In less than two months, however, the Red Devils were preparing for another cruise, this time a surge deployment to commence in January 2008. From mid-November until that time, with breaks only for Thanksgiving and Christmas, the squadron conducted carrier workups, a daunting challenge with their old jets and the new personnel who had joined the squadron.

On 24 January 2008, just four months after the previous cruise ended, VMFA-232 began its third carrier cruise. This cruise, which was again aboard the *Nimitz* with CVW-11, was to the Western Pacific for five months. While in the Western Pacific, the Red Devils participated in Operation Foal Eagle 2008, a joint exercise with the Republic of Korea. In incredibly cold and snowy conditions, Red Devil pilots flew close air



Photo courtesy of LtCol Travis S. Kelley

A Red Devil escorts a Russian Tupolev Tu-95 Bear bomber during the squadron's 2008 Western Pacific deployment. It was not uncommon for the Marine fighter squadrons operating in the Western Pacific to intercept Russian Bear bombers that prowled the Pacific east of Russia.

support and counter-air sorties. While operating off South Korea's coast, Majors Michael C. Nesbitt and Travis S. Kelley twice intercepted Russian Tupolev Tu-95 Bear bombers that ventured too near the *Nimitz* carrier group. Following Foal Eagle, the *Nimitz* sailed to Okinawa, where



Photo by MC 3d Class Eduardo Zaragoza, USN

Assigned to VMFA-232, Marines clean an F/A-18A Hornet on the flight deck aboard the USS Nimitz, operating as part of the U.S. Seventh Fleet and conducting combined training exercises with the USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) Carrier Strike Group in the Western Pacific on 28 March 2008.

Red Devil pilots conducted air-to-ground training, which included dropping live BLU-111s (a steel-encased 500-pound bomb) and GBU-12s (a 500-pound joint direct attack munition) on Okino-Daito-Jima Island. The *Nimitz* sailed homeward in May, and the squadron was back in Miramar in early June. Soon afterward, Lieutenant Colonel Matthew D. Feringa relieved Lieutenant Colonel Hobson as squadron commander. The squadron went into a rebuilding process in the latter half of 2008, receiving a complement of truly “newer” variants of the F/A-18, as well as new personnel.

Operation Enduring Freedom

In preparing for a 2010 deployment to Afghanistan, VMFA-232 trained in air-ground integration tactics by participating in the realistic training scenarios implicit with Operation Scor-

pion Fire, Mojave Viper, and Enhanced Mojave Viper. For Mojave Viper the squadron lived and flew in expeditionary conditions from the airfield at Twentynine Palms, California. VMFA-232 also provided close air support training for the Marine Special Operations Battalion at the Expeditionary Warfare Training Group, Pacific in San Diego. The squadron expended 250,000 pounds of ordnance in the latter half of 2009 in training for their upcoming Afghanistan deployment. Pilots also trained for night operations, selected pilots attended weapons and tactics instructor training and the Top Gun course, and others trained to earn air combat tactics instructor qualifications. Captains Daniel W. Thompson and Christopher P. Allain obtained a new qualification for single-seat F/A-18 pilots, forward air controller (airborne).⁴¹ Finally, in anticipation of deployment to Afghanistan, two F/A-18D Hornets, the two-

seat variant of the Hornet, and their crews were added to the squadron. This aircraft carried the advanced tactical aerial reconnaissance system, which provided aerial photography to support air and ground operations. The F/A-18D's two-man crews were also specialized in airborne control of air strikes, which would be particularly valuable in Operation Enduring Freedom.

On 15 May 2010, VMFA-232, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Daniel L. Shipley, set out for Afghanistan, a journey that required four flight legs spanning nearly 10 days. Kandahar, Afghanistan, had an extremely busy airfield, with a spectrum of nations represented. Officers and Marines lived in a trailer-park type arrangement of metal vans, called "cans." The various nations' military contingents each had their own dining facilities, which allowed an assortment of ethnic cuisine to choose from when the Marines went "out to eat." Commercial fast food was also available. Yet in this seemingly benign environment, enemy rockets regularly impacted the airfield.⁴²

The combat missions Red Devil pilots flew included nontraditional intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance missions, counter-improvised explosive device missions, and close air support. Ordnance employment was frequent.* Red Devil pilots strafed and bombed the enemy, often in close proximity to friendly troops.⁴³

*The command chronology showed the intensity of combat operations during this period: On 5 September, a VMFA-232 pilot strafed in support of a Georgian Battalion as they broke contact with Taliban fighters. The same day, a section of Red Devil F/A-18s, while supporting the 1st Recon Battalion, dropped a GBU-38 (a 500-pound guided bomb) on a Taliban position and followed up with gun runs. On 8 September, a Red Devil pilot strafed enemy trenches and neutralized enemy fire directed at 2d Battalion, 9th Marines. The same day, near Kajaki Dam, a section of Red Devils dropped ordnance and obliterated enemy positions that had taken a Marine artillery unit under fire. On 9 September, a Red Devil pilot neutralized Taliban fighters who had been firing rocket propelled grenades at 2d Battalion, 9th Marines.

Combat operations went on 24 hours per day, and night close air support, including strafing, was not uncommon. The Hornets were allowed to descend to a lower altitude for strafing runs when enemy troops were plainly visible. This harkened back to the earlier days of close air support, not the modern era of high altitude bomb drops.

In one example of extremely close air support, one section of Red Devils, using the squadron call-sign of "Stoic," checked in with a forward air controller who, in describing his unit's situation, called for a 500-pound bomb to be dropped close to the Marines' position and inside the bomb's documented safety limit. After taking the necessary precautions, the lead pilot released the bomb. It smashed into and obliterated the Taliban position. The close proximity of the bomb blast resulted in a rain of debris that fell on the infantry Marines. After that, when the Red Devils reported in for a close air support mission, forward air controllers often concluded the mission brief with, "make it rain, Stoic," or "bring the rain."⁴⁴ A battery commander in the 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, affirmed the quality of VMFA-232's air support by writing, "On many occasions, we found ourselves facing a tenacious enemy intent on destroying us. However, we always knew that whatever the situation, we could count on Stoic to arrive and bring some pain [to the enemy]."⁴⁵ Stoic was often specifically requested by ground commanders and FACs for air support.

Red Devil maintenance Marines provided combat-ready Hornets to meet the squadron's requirements. As the combat deployment neared its end in November, Red Devil maintainers averaged 87.3 percent fully mission capable jets. The Operation Enduring Freedom deployment had been successful. The squadron met all its mission requirements and, more importantly, the squadron had the opportunity to fly its core mission—supporting Marines in combat. The Red Devils once again received the Robert M. Hanson Award for their 2010 performance.



Photo by Sgt Deanne Hurla, courtesy of Defense Imagery

A VMFA-232 F/A-18D Hornet receives fuel from a Lockheed KC-130J Hercules from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 on 5 October 2010 over Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The Red Devils provided air support for Marines and Coalition troops of the International Security Assistance Forces.



Photo courtesy of LtCol Daniel L. Shipley

Members of India Battery, 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, display a plaque created for VMFA-232 in appreciation of the unit's close air support during a deployment to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom in 2010. The "39" and "5" represent the number of each type of bomb dropped by VMFA-232 aircraft during the deployment. The plaque now hangs in the Red Devil ready room.

Into the Next 100 Years

After returning from Afghanistan to MCAS Miramar in early November 2010, the Red Devils resumed training, anticipating a return to combat. On a historical note, the Red Devils participated in a March 2011 flyover in San Diego to commemorate U.S. naval aviation's 100th anniversary. The Red Devils also deployed to NAS Key West, Florida, to hone their air-to-air skills. During the two-week deployment, the unit fought dissimilar adversaries in a range of scenarios and, at times, in an electronic warfare environment with British Hawker Hunter subsonic jet aircraft providing electronic jamming. On 17 June 2011, Lieutenant Colonel Travis S. Kelley took command of the squadron. He led the squadron in preparing not for a combat deployment but a de-



Photo courtesy of Maj Dustin J. Byrum

Maj Travis S. Kelley flies over the Australian coast in an F/A-18 Hornet during the Red Devils' Western Pacific deployment in 2012.

ployment to the Western Pacific, which was to commence 13 March 2012.

Instead of transiting the Pacific in two separate groups or cells, the Red Devils flew in a single 12-plane package. Their route took them through Hawaii, to Wake Island, and then to MCAS Iwakuni with U.S. Air Force Boeing KC-135 Stratotankers and McDonnell Douglas KC-10 Extenders providing aerial refueling. As a testament to the squadron's superior maintenance, all 12 Hornets arrived in Iwakuni together. No aircraft had broken down during the trans-Pacific transit, a very common occurrence in squadrons flying long distances.

This deployment, as was characteristic of all the Western Pacific deployments, provided challenging training. Unlike a carrier deploy-

ment or a deployment into combat, these deployments enhanced aviators' proficiency and combat readiness by exercising all the mission sets of the F/A-18s. The Red Devils deployed to Guam along with the other two MAG-12 Hornet squadrons—VMFA(AW)-121 and 242—for five weeks of realistic combat training. Led by MAG-12 commanding officer Colonel Christopher J. Mahoney, training provided search-coordinated armed reconnaissance/armed reconnaissance flights, including in an urban scenario. A 72-hour surge operation was also flown in which each squadron flew more than 100 flight hours. Another major training evolution occurred in the Australian outback when the Red Devils deployed to Royal Australian Air Force Base Tindal for six weeks and trained with Australia's No. 75

Squadron. Pilots were able to maximize the air-to-ground training opportunities afforded by the fabulous training ranges and targets available in Tindal's isolated setting.⁴⁶ Slightly more than six months after arriving at MCAS Iwakuni, the Red Devils returned home to MCAS Miramar, flying three legs across the Pacific. As in the flight to Australia, there were no maintenance breakdowns and all 12 Red Devil Hornets taxied onto their flight line at Miramar together for a homecoming celebration.

A short time later, on 7 December 2012, Lieutenant Colonel Kelley turned over command to Lieutenant Colonel Byron D. Sullivan. Sullivan and the Red Devils rolled into 2013 intent on carrying forward the Red Devil legacy of

superior performance. Commissioned in 1925 as the Marine Corps' oldest tactical squadron, the Red Devils approached their 88th year of flying. The squadron had started with biplanes and lofting bombs out the cockpit and now offered supersonic jets and dropping laser or GPS-guided bombs. On the horizon, the Red Devils anticipated employing the next generation fighter, the Lockheed-Martin F-35B Lightning II, or Joint Strike Fighter. As with each new generation of tactical aircraft the squadron had flown, advanced technology and tactics allowed improved air support. The same will hold true when the Red Devils fly the F-35 into the next century of Marine aviation as it continues its mission of providing air support for Marine infantry units.

Notes

The principal source materials used in preparation of this history are held by, or are obtainable from, the History Division, Reference Branch, Quantico, VA. One of the most important files in this group is VMFA-232 Squadron History File, hereafter VMFA-232 HistFile. It should be noted that this reference file contains information from early years before the squadron received the VMFA designation as well as later materials.

Early Developments

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMTB-232 Unit History Files (History Division, Reference Branch, Quantico, VA), hereafter VMTB-232 UnitHistFile; and from comments on the draft manuscript contained in the VMFA-232 Comment File (History Division, Reference Branch, Quantico, VA), hereafter VMFA-232 CommFile.

1. Maj Edwin H. Brainard, "Marine Aviation—A Lecture," *Marine Corps Gazette* 11, no. 3 (September 1926): 192.
2. All biographical data on general officers comes from the biographical file at History Division, Reference Branch, Quantico, VA.
3. Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Force Press, 1952), 27–28, hereafter Sherrod, *Aviation*.
4. "History of Aircraft Squadrons, W. C. E. F.," VMTB-232 UnitHistFile.
5. LtGen Richard C. Mangrum, comments on draft MS, 6 February 1978, VMFA-232 CommFile, hereafter Mangrum comments.
6. CNO ltr to CO VMTB-232, Subj: Squadron Insignia, 30 August 1944, VMFA-232 HistFile.
7. "History of VMTB-232 Squadron Insignia," VMTB-232 UnitHistFile.
8. Mangrum comments.
9. Ibid.
10. Capt F. P. Mulcahy, "Marine Corps Winners of the Herbert Schiff Memorial Trophy," *Marine Corps Gazette* 18, no. 1 (February 1934): 28–29.

World War II

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMSB-232 War Diaries, July 1941–November 1945, and from VMSB-232 muster rolls for the same period. All materials located in National Archives and Records Administration.

11. VMSB-232 muster rolls, December 1941.

12. Sherrod, *Aviation*, 96.

13. Ibid., 196.

Reactivation

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from the VMFA-232 War Diaries, June 1948–March 1953, National Archives and Records Administration and from VMFA-232 HistFile.

14. *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1945–46*, compiled and edited by Leonard Bridgman (New York: McMillan Co., 1946), 259c, hereafter, *Jane's Aircraft*, 1946.
15. Ibid., 218c–219c.
16. VMFA-232 HistFile.

The Jet Age

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from the VMFA-232 HistFile, the *Flight Jacket*, the base newspaper of MCAS El Toro, California, and *The Windward Marine*, the base newspaper of MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii.

17. VMFA-232 HistFile.
18. Cono R. Borrelli, e-mail to author, 22 April 2014, author's files, History Division, Quantico, VA.
19. VMF-232 unit diary, September 1958–March 1959, National Archives and Records Administration.
20. *Jane's Aircraft*, 1961–62, 235.
21. *Marine Fighter Squadron 232—1962 WestPac Cruise Report*, 8 December 1962, cited in VMFA-232 HistFile.
22. Ibid.

Combat and the Far East

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from the VMF(AW)-232 Command Chronologies, March 1965–August 1967, and from VMFA-232 Command Chronologies, September 1967–December 1976, hereafter VMFA-232 ComdC. All materials located in National Archives and Records Administration.

23. U.S. Naval Safety Center, Aircraft Accident Printout for USMC Aircraft in Combat Environment (July 1963–January 1973).

24. Ibid.

25. *Jane's Aircraft*, 1966–67, 284.

26. FMFPac, "Operations of U.S. Marine Forces in Vietnam," April 1972.

27. Ibid.

28. MAG-15 Command Chronology, April–June 1972.

Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm

29. VMFA-232 ComdC, January 1991 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 1–2.

30. Ibid., Part 2, 2.

31. Ibid., Part 2.

Onset of the Global War on Terrorism and Operation Iraqi Freedom I

32. Maj Dustin J. Byrum, intvw with Fred Allison, 30 April 2013, digital recording (Oral History Collection, Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), hereafter Byrum intvw.

33. VMFA-232 ComdC, 1 January–31 March 2003 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 4–5.

Carrier Operations with the U.S. Navy

34. VMFA-232 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2004 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 1–3.

35. Byrum intvw.

36. Ibid.

37. VMFA-232 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2005 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 3–6.

38. LtCol Simon M. Doran, intvw with Fred Allison, 25 April 2013, digital recording (Oral History Collection, Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA).

39. VMFA-232 ComdC, 1 January–30 June 2007 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 3–6.

40. Ibid.; VMFA-232 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2007 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 5–10, 18.

Operation Enduring Freedom

41. VMFA-232 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2008 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 4–13.

42. LtCol Travis S. Kelley, intvw with Fred Allison, 16 May 2013, digital recording (Oral History Collection, Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), hereafter Kelley intvw.

43. VMFA-232 ComdC, 1–30 September 2010 (Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA), Part 2, 4.

44. LtCol Daniel L. Shipley, intvw with Fred Allison, 24 June 2013, digital recording (Oral History Collection, Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA); Kelley intvw.

45. LtCol Daniel L. Shipley, e-mail to author, 23 April 2014, author's files, History Division, Quantico, VA. The email includes the letter sent from Capt Richard Stinnett, Battery Commander, 1/11 I Btry to VMFA-232 dtd 18 November 2010 and contains the quote referenced.

Into the Next 100 Years

46. Kelley intvw.

Appendix A

CHRONOLOGY

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1 September 1925 | Activated at NAS San Diego, California, as Division 1, Fighting Plane Squadron 3M, 2d Aviation Group |
| September 1926 | Reassigned to Aircraft Squadrons, West Coast Expeditionary Force |
| April–June 1927 | Deployed to Hsin Ho, China, and reassigned to Aircraft Squadrons, 3d Brigade |
| 25 June 1927 | Redesignated as Fighting Plane Squadron 10M (VF-10M) |
| 1 July 1928 | Redesignated as VF-6M |
| September–October 1928 | Relocated to NAS San Diego and reassigned to Aircraft Squadrons, West Coast Expeditionary Force |
| 1 July 1930 | Redesignated as VF-10M |
| 1 July 1933 | Redesignated as Bombing Plane Squadron 4M (VB-4M) |
| 1 July 1937 | Redesignated as Marine Bombing Squadron 2 (VMB-2) |
| January 1941 | Deployed to Pearl Harbor and assigned to 2d Marine Aircraft Group |
| 1 July 1941 | Designated as Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 232 (VMSB-232) |
| August 1941 | Reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 21 (MAG-21), 2d Marine Aircraft Wing (2d MAW) |
| December 1941–August 1945 | Participated in the following WWII Campaigns: <div> <div>Pearl Harbor</div> <div>Guadalcanal</div> <div>New Georgia</div> <div>Bougainville</div> <div>Bismarck Archipelago</div> <div>Northern Solomon</div> <div>Okinawa</div> </div> |
| 1 June 1943 | Redesignated as Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 232 (VMTB-232) |
| November 1945 | Relocated to NAS San Diego |
| 16 November 1945 | Deactivated |

History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 3 June 1948 | Reactivated at Floyd Bennett Field, New York, as Marine Fighter Squadron 232 (VMF-232), Marine Air Detachment, Marine Air Reserve Training Command |
| 1 April 1949 | Redesignated as VMF-232 |
| October 1950 | Relocated to MCAS El Toro, California, and reassigned to MAG-15, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific |
| August–September 1952 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and reassigned to MAG-13 |
| March 1953 | Relocated to MCAS El Toro, and reassigned to MAG-15 |
| September 1953 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, and reassigned to MAG-13 |
| February 1958 | MAG-13 reassigned to 1st Marine Brigade |
| September–October 1958 | MAG-13 relocated to NAS Atsugi, Japan |
| February–March 1959 | MAG-13 relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay |
| June–December 1962 | VMFA-232 at sea in the Western Pacific with the Seventh Fleet |
| 1 March 1965 | Redesignated as Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 232 (VMF[AW]-232) |
| May 1965 | Detached from MAG-13 |
| 2 September 1966 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan |
| September 1966–September 1967 | Relocated to Da Nang Air Base, Vietnam, and reassigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW |
| 1 September 1967 | Relocated to the United States and assigned to MAG-33, 3d MAW, at MCAS El Toro |
| 9 September 1967 | Redesignated as VMFA-232 |
| 27 March 1969 | Relocated to Chu Lai, Vietnam, and reassigned to MAG-13, 1st MAW |
| 7 September 1969 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni and assigned to MAG-15, 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (9th MAB) |
| 8 November 1969 | Reassigned to MAG-15, 1st MAW |
| 6 April 1972 | Relocated to Da Nang |
| 20 June 1972 | Relocated to Royal Thai Air Base Nam Phong, Thailand |
| 1 September 1973 | Relocated to NAS Cubi Point, Philippines |
| 14 November 1973 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni |
| 17 December 1973 | Relocated to NAF Naha, Okinawa, Japan |
| 12 February 1974 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 7 October 1977 | Relocate to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 28 September 1978 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-15, 1st MAW |
| 30 March 1979 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 4 April 1980 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-15, 1st MAW |
| 11 October 1980 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 9 September 1981 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-15, 1st MAW |
| 20 March 1982 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 6 March 1983 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-15, 1st MAW |
| 7 October 1983 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 5 October 1984 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-15, 1st MAW |
| 3 April 1985 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 7 April 1986 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-15, 1st MAW |
| 15 October 1986 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-15, 1st Marine Brigade |
| January–June 1989 | Unit transitions to McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornet aircraft |
| 16 December 1990 | Relocated to Shaikh Isa Air Base, Bahrain, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 6 April 1991 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 6 August 1991 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 8 February 1992 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 10 February 1993 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 27 July 1993 | Relocated to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, MAG-24, 1st Marine Brigade |
| 6 August 1993 | Relocated to MCAS El Toro, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 7 August 1994 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 10 February 1995 | Relocated to MCAS El Toro, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 15 February 1995 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, California, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 6 February 1996 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |

History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| 14 August 1996 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 30 June 1997 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 9 January 1998 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 15 September 1999 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 19 March 2000 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 14 September 2001 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 18 September 2001 | Relocated to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| February 2002 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 16 March 2002 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 1 February 2003 | Relocated to al-Jaber Air Base, Kuwait, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 5 May 2003 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 7 May 2005 | Relocated to USS <i>Nimitz</i> (CVN 68), Carrier Air Wing 11 (CVW-11), Carrier Strike Group 11 (CSG-11) |
| 7 November 2005 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 2 April 2007 | Relocated to the <i>Nimitz</i> , CVW-11, CSG-11 |
| 30 September 2007 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 24 January 2008 | Relocated to the <i>Nimitz</i> , CVW-11, CSG-11 |
| 2 June 2008 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 25 May 2010 | Relocated to Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, 3d MAW (Fwd), I MEF |
| 2 December 2010 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |
| 13 March 2012 | Relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, MAG-12, 1st MAW |
| 27 September 2012 | Relocated to MCAS Miramar, MAG-11, 3d MAW |

Appendix B

COMMANDING OFFICERS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2dLt Clayton C. Jerome | 1–19 September 1925 |
| 1stLt William J. Wallace..... | 20 September–6 November 1925 |
| Capt Harry H. Shepherd..... | 7 November–1 December 1925 |
| 2dLt Clayton C. Jerome | 2 December–11 March 1926 |
| Capt Harold D. Campbell..... | 12–17 March 1926 |
| Capt Francis P. Mulcahy | 18 March–3 June 1926 |
| 1stLt William J. Wallace..... | 4 June–14 November 1926 |
| 2dLt Frank H. Lamson-Scribner | 15 November–15 December 1926 |
| 1stLt William J. Wallace..... | 16 December 1926–31 August 1928 |
| 1stLt Arthur H. Page Jr. | 1 September–31 October 1928 |
| 1stLt Clayton C. Jerome..... | 1 November 1928–30 June 1930 |
| 1stLt Stanley E. Ridderhof | 1–14 July 1930 |
| 2dLt Samuel S. Jack | 15 July–31 August 1930 |
| 2dLt Richard C. Mangrum | 1–22 September 1930 |
| 2dLt Elvin B. Ryan..... | 23 September–14 October 1930 |
| 1stLt Vernon M. Guymon..... | 15 October–15 December 1931 |
| 1stLt Calvin R. Freeman | 16 December 1931–27 January 1932 |
| Capt Vernon M. Guymon | 28 January 1932–13 August 1933 |
| 1stLt Lawrence T. Burke..... | 14 August 1933–5 February 1934 |
| 1stLt Allen C. Koonce..... | 6–15 February 1934 |
| Capt Vernon M. Guymon | 16–22 February 1934 |
| 1stLt Allen C. Koonce..... | 23 February–31 March 1934 |
| 1stLt Albert D. Cooley..... | 1 April–31 October 1934 |
| 1stLt Stanley E. Ridderhof | 1 November 1934–23 April 1935 |
| 1stLt William G. Manley | 24 April–12 August 1935 |

History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Capt Vernon M. Guymon | 13 August 1935–14 May 1937 |
| Capt Edward L. Pugh..... | 15–28 May 1937 |
| Capt Frank D. Weir | 29 May 1937–30 April 1938 |
| Capt Hayne D. Boyden..... | 1 May 1938–24 January 1940 |
| Capt Pierson E. Conradt | 25 January–4 June 1940 |
| Capt Ward E. Dickey | 5–30 June 1940 |
| Maj Ira L. Kimes | 1 July 1940–6 January 1942 |
| Maj Richard C. Mangrum..... | 7 January–31 December 1942 |
| 1stLt Henry W. Hise | 1 January–5 February 1943 |
| Capt Rolland F. Smith..... | 6 February 1943–14 April 1944 |
| 1stLt Charles R. Ryan | 15–25 April 1944 |
| Maj Menard Doswell III..... | 26 April 1944–19 January 1945 |
| Maj Allen L. Feldmeier..... | 20 January–16 November 1945 |
| UNIT INACTIVE..... | 17 November 1945–31 May 1948 |
| Capt Thomas S. Ferdinand..... | 1 June 1948–8 October 1950 |
| LtCol Joseph A. Gray | 9 October 1950–31 October 1951 |
| Maj Frank H. Presley..... | 1–30 November 1951 |
| LtCol Robert C. Hammond Jr. | 1 December 1951–23 March 1953 |
| LtCol Robert R. Burns..... | 24 March 1953–31 July 1954 |
| LtCol Donald D. Blue..... | 1 August–22 November 1954 |
| LtCol William M. Watkins Jr. | 23 November 1954–18 July 1955 |
| Maj Edward R. Agnew | 19 July–14 October 1955 |
| Maj Stephen G. Warren..... | 15 October 1955–2 September 1956 |
| Maj Emmett O. Anglin Jr..... | 3 September 1956–10 May 1957 |
| LtCol Jay W. Hubbard | 11 May 1957–18 October 1958 |
| LtCol Louis H. Steman | 19 October 1958–19 August 1960 |
| LtCol Robert R. Peebles | 20 August 1960–8 December 1961 |
| LtCol Douglas D. Petty Jr. | 9 December 1961–30 April 1963 |
| LtCol Jack R. Sloan..... | 1 May 1963–8 May 1964 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| LtCol Harrel K. Jobe..... | 9 May 1964–30 April 1965 |
| Maj Gerard M. Kieswetter..... | 1 May–31 July 1965 |
| LtCol Nicholas M. Trapnell Jr. | 1 August 1965–22 March 1967 |
| Maj Melvin H. Sautter | 23 March–31 August 1967 |
| Maj Norbert F. Schnippel Jr. | 1 September–31 October 1967 |
| LtCol Walter P. Hutchins | 1 November 1967–11 August 1969 |
| LtCol Ralph J. Sorensen | 12 August 1969–3 March 1970 |
| LtCol Robert E. Solliday | 4 March–14 October 1970 |
| LtCol Joseph S. Rosenthal..... | 15 October 1970–5 August 1971 |
| LtCol Joe L. Gregorcyk | 6 August 1971–9 May 1972 |
| LtCol Edward R. Maag | 10 May–8 September 1972 |
| LtCol Rodney O. Lawrence..... | 9 September 1972–19 April 1973 |
| LtCol James M. Mead | 20 April 1973–15 March 1974 |
| Maj Frederick J. Schober | 16 March–19 July 1974 |
| Maj Jack B. Hammond | 20 July–6 August 1974 |
| LtCol Warren A. Ferdinand..... | 7 August 1974–30 June 1976 |
| LtCol Robert L. Daniels..... | 1 July 1975–10 June 1976 |
| LtCol Albert K. Charlton | 11 June 1976–6 October 1977 |
| LtCol Frank J. Horak Jr..... | 7 October 1977–4 May 1979 |
| Maj L. A. Stults | 5 May 1979–10 January 1980 |
| LtCol Kevin P. O'Mara..... | 11 January 1980–26 May 1982 |
| LtCol Augustus Fitch III | 27 May 1982–1 March 1984 |
| LtCol Barry V. Banks | 2 March 1984–23 July 1985 |
| LtCol William L. Nyland | 24 July 1985–1 July 1987 |
| LtCol George C. Tullos | 2 July 1987–9 June 1989 |
| LtCol Victor A. Simpson..... | 10 June 1989–16 May 1991 |
| LtCol Mark R. Mitchell | 17 May 1991–1 May 1992 |
| LtCol James E. Cartwright | 2 May–10 December 1992 |
| LtCol David F. Gould | 11 December 1992–10 June 1994 |

History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| LtCol Robert M. Knutzen..... | 11 June 1994–17 November 1995 |
| LtCol Jeffrey L. Olson..... | 18 November 1995–6 March 1997 |
| LtCol Charles F. Mitchell..... | 7 March 1997–11 September 1998 |
| LtCol William J. Miles..... | 12 September 1998–20 April 2000 |
| LtCol Terrance A. Gould..... | 21 April 2000–29 June 2001 |
| LtCol Edward G. Hackett..... | 30 June 2001–13 December 2002 |
| LtCol Michael H. Burt..... | 14 December 2002–23 July 2004 |
| LtCol Douglas S. Kurth..... | 24 July 2004–26 May 2006 |
| LtCol Hunter H. Hobson..... | 27 May 2006–20 June 2008 |
| LtCol Matthew D. Feringa..... | 21 June 2008–15 January 2010 |
| LtCol Daniel L. Shipley..... | 16 January 2010–17 June 2011 |
| LtCol Travis S. Kelley..... | 18 June 2011–7 December 2012 |
| LtCol Byron D. Sullivan..... | 8 December 2012–27 June 2014 |

Appendix C

HONORS

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER WITH THREE BRONZE STARS

Solomons, 24 August–13 October 1942

Okinawa, 4 April–30 June 1945

Vietnam, 15 November 1966–13 September 1967

Iraq, 21 March–24 April 2003

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER WITH THREE BRONZE STARS

Vietnam, 27 March–7 September 1969

Vietnam, 21 June–31 December 1972

Southwest Asia, 14 August 1990–16 April 1991

Afghanistan, May–November 2010

MERITORIOUS UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER AND ONE BRONZE STAR

2 January 1985–15 October 1986

1 June 1989–30 June 1990

1 December 1992–31 May 1994

1 May 1995–30 April 1996

1 July 1999–30 June 2000

9 August 2000–6 May 2002

YANGTZE SERVICE STREAMER

Shanghai, 13 June–21 October 1927

MARINE CORPS EXPEDITIONARY STREAMER

China, 22 October 1927–3 October 1928

AMERICAN DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER
WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

Hawaii, 8 September 1939–7 December 1941

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER
WITH ONE SILVER AND THREE BRONZE STARS

Pearl Harbor-Midway, 7 December 1941

Capture and defense of Guadalcanal, 20 August–2 November 1942

Cape Esperance, 11–12 October 1942

New Georgia, 23 September–16 October 1943

Bismarck Archipelago, 20 January–1 May 1944

Northern Solomons, 2 May–19 June 1944

Okinawa, 1 April–30 June 1945

WORLD WAR II VICTORY STREAMER

7 December 1941–16 November 1945

NAVY OCCUPATION SERVICE STREAMER
WITH ASIA CLASP

Okinawa, 2 September–31 October 1945

NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER
WITH THREE BRONZE STARS

18 September 1950–27 July 1954

1 January 1961–15 August 1974

2 August 1990–30 November 1995

11 September 2001–TBD

VIETNAM SERVICE STREAMER
WITH ONE SILVER STAR

Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase II, 15 November 1966–31 May 1967

Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase III, 1 June–13 September 1967

Tet 69/Counteroffensive, 31 March–8 June 1969

Vietnam, Summer–Fall 1969, 9 June–7 September 1969

Vietnam, Cease-Fire Campaign, 6 April 1972–28 January 1973

SOUTHWEST ASIA SERVICE STREAMER
WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

2 August 1990–16 January 1991

17 January 1991–11 April 1991

AFGHANISTAN CAMPAIGN STREAMER
WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Consolidation II, May 2007

Consolidation III, May–November 2010

IRAQ CAMPAIGN STREAMER
WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Iraqi Governance, May–November 2005

Iraqi Surge, June–July 2007

GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM EXPEDITIONARY STREAMER

February–May 2003

GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM SERVICE STREAMER

11 September 2001–TBD

VIETNAM CROSS OF GALLANTRY WITH PALM STREAMER

15 November 1966–7 September 1969

