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UNITED STATES NAVY AND MARINE CORPS BASES, DOMESTIC

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air unit to report aboard, on 1 January 1943, was Marine Air Base Defense Aircraft Group 43, soon redesignated Marine Air Group (MAG 43) and still at the base at the end of the war. Commissioning occurred on 23 July 1943, Lt. Col. Thomas J. McQuade commanding.

Many were the trained squadrons that left El Centro for forward operating areas in the Pacific, and as the desirability of the base for training purposes became increasingly evident, the construction of a second area was authorized. Work began on 10 April 1944 and was completed for occupancy in December, with MAG-35 and a transport training group the first groups to come on board. The initial allotment for construction under a cost-plus-fixed-fee contract was \$6,014,671. The final expenditure for the first area was \$8.5 million; for the second area, \$3 million. To the end of 1944, sixteen squadrons of fighter, bomber, and transport aircraft pilots and aircrewmembers were trained at El Centro.

Soon after the end of World War II, El Centro was greatly reduced and on 1 May 1946 was commissioned as a naval auxiliary air station. On 15 October 1946 its status was that of modified maintenance. On 6 January 1947 the Bureau of Aeronautics established there a storage pool for TD2 *Devastator* torpedo aircraft and on 20 March authorized Western Air Lines to operate two flights daily. Its condition when inspected by the staff of the Commandant of the Eleventh Naval District had been found to be "good to very good." Inspected again on 3 June 1947, the report read "very good." In November 1947 the Parachute Experimental Division from NAS Lakehurst, N.J. (q.v.), moved to El Centro. On 9 June the Joint Parachute Test Facility was established; it consisted of the Naval Parachute Unit and the 6511 Parachute Development Test Group. Also, from 1947 to 1964, the Air Force cooperated as part of El Centro's test organization. The Naval Aerospace Recovery Facility commissioned in 1964 was combined with the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility on 1 July 1973 to form the National Parachute Test Range. When the last was transferred to the Naval Weapons Center, Inyokern/China Lake (q.v.), on 1 July 1979, El Centro again became a naval air facility.

Soon after the end of World War II, El Centro was used to provide support to various fleet squadrons. In 1949 there was established the Fleet Gunnery Unit, which for ten years provided support for squadrons that came to conduct gunnery, bombing, and carrier landing practice. In addition, a permanent detachment from Attack Squadron 174 beginning in 1979 provided maintenance support for East Coast A-7 pilots who fly out to use the range area. The expanded Desert Test Range is a modern inert target complex that utilizes remote TV and acoustical and laser scoring systems. The current mission of NAF El Centro is to support operational fleet units that come for bombing and gunnery practice or to use the simulated carrier deck landing area. In use are four runways, the longest of which is equipped with a permanent mirror landing system at each approach end. El Centro is the winter home for training for the Blue Angels Demonstration Team.

At the nearby town of El Centro is a general hospital, eleven public and

parochial elementary schools, two junior high schools, one high school, and two schools for higher education: Imperial Valley (two-year) Community College, and the San Diego State College extension at Imperial Valley Center, Calexico. There are two man-made lakes nearby, and mountain areas and the former site of a naval seaplane base at Salton Sea, Westmorland, Calif. (q.v.) are but an hour's drive away. The usual range of station facilities is available, with quarters for 29 officers and 141 men, and off-base housing located in three suburban areas located within two miles of El Centro. Word about station affairs is passed in part through *The Sand Paper*. In addition to Attack Squadron 174, a second tenant command is U.S. Air Force Space and Missile System Organization (or SAMSO), which works with NAVSTAR, a naval satellite navigation system useful to all branches of the armed forces.

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EL TORO (SANTA ANA), CALIF., MARINE CORPS AIR STATION, 1944-

On 15 September 1944 Col. William J. Fox, USMCR, who during World War II served as a representative with Army and Navy people on a site selection board to choose sites for air stations in southern California, became the aviation assistant to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In this billet his mission involved the military direction and administrative coordination of Marine Corps aeronautical activities in the Eleventh Naval District. In addition to subordinate units at Marine Corps Air Stations (MCAS) at Santa Barbara (Goleta) (q.v.), Mojave (q.v.), and El Centro (q.v.), he had charge of the Marine Corps Air Department at Miramar (q.v.); the Headquarters Squadron, Marine Corps Activities, Naval Air Bases, Eleventh Naval District; and Marine auxiliary air stations at Gillespie, Ill.; Chino Field, Ontario; and Ryan Field, Hemet, Calif., all outlying fields for El Toro.

Since Naval Air Station (LTA) Santa Ana (q.v.) is covered separately, a brief resume of El Toro's beginnings must suffice.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States direly needed aviation training areas. Because of the mountainous terrain and limited air space in southern California, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps became involved in numerous conflicts. A particular problem was that the Army, responsible for coast defense, might send up aircraft to intercept naval or Marine aircraft and thus disrupt training schedules, and the Marines were under the pressure of knowing that their squadrons would soon be sent to engage in combat in the South Pacific. In early 1942 Marine aviation had only two wings, the First and

Second, both made up of skeleton squadrons with fewer than 200 planes. They needed at least five additional air stations on the West Coast, with their establishment marking the first time that such stations would be located along that coast. On 20 January 1942 Maj. Gen. Ross E. Rowell, Commanding General Second Marine Air Wing (MAW), met with the Fourth Air Force at Eleventh Naval District headquarters to determine the feasibility of establishing a Joint Air Conference. As a result, Brig. Gen. Ralph J. Mitchell, Director, went to Rear Adm. John Towers, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, and to the Secretary of the Navy and secured an appropriation of \$35 million with authority to select and construct five MCASs on the West Coast. Site selection devolved upon Colonel Fox, who was directed to select all five sites in the Imperial Valley. Despite summer dust storms and hot temperatures and cold winters, flight operations could be carried on in that valley for 92 percent of the year, the rest being impeded by fog and the Santa Ana winds that blow dust and heat in from the desert. On 20 June Fox told General Rowell that El Toro, about fifty miles south of Los Angeles and near the Orange County community of Santa Ana, would be an excellent site for the parent Marine Corps station. The site selected (eight miles southeast of Santa Ana at 33°40'18"N., 117°43'43"W., and at an elevation of only 331.4 feet) was a 2,400-acre one on the huge Irvine Ranch. It was then planted in beans. An additional thousand acres were available at Plano Trabuco for dive bombing target practice.

Advised by a panel of experts, Fox got construction under way on 3 August 1942. The Prospective Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Theodore B. Millard, reported on board on 23 September, and in October the site became the nucleus of Base Headquarters Squadron. The men lived for a time in the bunkhouses once used by Irvine Ranch cowboys. By December the runways, taxiways, and warm-up platforms for two symmetrical units were ready for use, and by the end of January 1943 men could move into their barracks or BOQs. Marine flyers recently in action against the Japanese served as instructors. The station was commissioned on 17 March 1943. In July construction began on barracks for a contingent of WAVES, and by August 1943 there were on board 6,831 military men and women and 553 civilians. In early 1944 an \$18 million improvement program allowed a 100 percent expansion in structures and operations, a new control tower, aircraft parking space, mess halls, bakery, photography laboratory, a 2,000-seat auditorium, a major assembly and repair plant, a major supply depot, roads, walks, additions to the water and sewage systems, and other facilities. From a bean patch had risen an aerodrome including 52 structures, 9.2 miles of roads, 660,000 square yards of runways and taxiways, 139,281 square yards of warm-up platform, 10 miles of water system, and a 10-mile sewer system—all at a site now extended to 4,000 acres.

Departments included operations, physical conditioning, Link training, gunnery, supply, recognition, quartermaster, ordnance, communications, aeronautical publications center, chaplain, and Red Cross. Types of planes included fighters, scout bombers, torpedo bombers, and observation craft. By January

1945 El Toro was the largest of the Marine Corps activities within the Eleventh Naval District and in addition had the various satellite fields already mentioned, with at least two of them being used for carrier landing or "bouncing" practice. Fuel is piped in from the Navy Fuel Annex at San Pedro, Calif. On 30 October 1946 the Commander, Marine Air West Coast, moved his headquarters to El Toro from MCAS Miramar.

By order of the Chief of Naval Operations, El Toro was to have been decommissioned effective 31 May 1947. A change of mind occurred, however, and in 1950 it was selected as the permanent center of Marine Aviation on the West Coast and of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Throughout the Korean and Vietnam wars El Toro provided a training, storage, and distribution point for Marines on their way to the battlefronts. To comply with this commitment, the Third MAW was made up of fighter, attack, helicopter, photographic reconnaissance, observation, refueling, transport, and radar aircraft and a headquarters squadron.

In 1960 El Toro had on board 8,000 men and women Marines and 2,000 civilians. Its value was placed at \$72,347,892.69 and its payroll at an annual \$58 million. During the 1960s it was visited frequently by President Lyndon B. Johnson and then by President Richard M. Nixon, when he was on his way to his San Clemente hideaway. During the Vietnam War Continental Air Lines 707s and Air Force *Stratolifters* took off from El Toro with ground troops bound for Vietnam and returned with those leaving the war zone. During the exodus from Vietnam, especially in 1975, one flight of refugees took place from El Toro each day of the year.

Today El Toro serves as home for the Third MAW and for Marine Aircraft Group 46. The former, with hundreds of planes and 5,000 Marines, is the largest tenant command. Its mission is "to maintain and operate facilities and provide services and material to support operations of a Marine Aircraft Wing, or units thereof, and other activities and units as designated by the Commandant of the Marine Corps in coordination with the Chief of Naval Operations." Its Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron is the largest in the Marine Corps at this writing. In addition to administering El Toro, it is responsible for Sub Unit No. 1 at Marine Corps Air Facility, Camp Pendleton (*see* San Diego, Calif., Naval and Marine Corps Bases), and, with the "grunts" (ground troops) of Camp Pendleton, seeks to improve methods of close air support and of vertical envelopment. It has a full range of personal services and a wide range of schools. A Child Care Center provides not only babysitting but preschool and kindergarten classes. Elementary and high school courses are available in the Irvine Unified School District; Saddleback College offers an associate of arts degree; Southern Illinois University offers a sixteen-month bachelor of science degree in the field of Aviation Management; and Webster College offers a master's degree in business, management, and human relations.

History made by the various Marine air groups at El Toro would easily fill a volume. For example, after training at Cherry Point, N.C. (q.v.), and at NAS

Miami, Fla. (q.v.), the Third MAW was reactivated for the Korean War and then was joined by MAG-15 and MAG-36 with its helicopter squadrons at nearby Santa Ana. While some squadrons were deployed to Vietnam, others continuously sought to improve close air support and vertical assault methods. MAG-11 was deployed to Taiwan in 1958–1959 and 1961–1963 and to Vietnam between 1965 and 1971. Its headquarters squadron had an even more varied career, having served at Quantico, Va. (q.v.), in the 1920s, in the Central Pacific during World War II, at NAS Atsugi, Japan, to support the Korean War, and later in Taiwan and Vietnam. VMFA-314, 323, and 531 of Marine Air Base Squadron I have served aboard the USS *Midway* (CV-41), homeported at Yokosuka, Japan; VMFA-314, the first squadron in the wing to change to jet aircraft (in 1952), was deployed to Vietnam, where it flew more than 28,000 missions. In 1982 VMFA-314 transited to the F/A-18 *Hornet*. Similar histories can be offered of the other squadrons.

A unique activity at El Toro, begun in 1972, is a two-week course offered by the FBI in SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) to men who will fight crime, protect VIPs, help prevent aircraft hijacking, and support the arrival and removal of nuclear devices through the El Toro area.

El Toro is heavily engaged in such community projects as sponsoring Boy Scout Jamborees and Junior Olympics for the Handicapped. It also has a Naval Air Maintenance Training Group Detachment that teaches 149 courses from three to sixty-one days in length, with 104 instructors handling nearly 6,000 students annually. Among a dozen Marine schools are those instructing on aircraft instruments, maintenance, survival, ejection seats, low pressure practices, jet instrumentation, special weapons, and tactical atomic weapons operations. In addition to on-base recreational facilities, personnel from El Toro are within easy driving distance of Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, and the ocean spas of Laguna Beach and Huntington Beach. An hour's drive is all that is needed to reach Los Angeles and Hollywood. Many active and retired Marines and civilian employees have bought homes in the El Toro area and enjoy, as other civilians do, such services from El Toro as fire fighting, flood control, rescue, and even air search for lost children. A yearly highlight is "Open House," which draws thousands of visitors to view static and aerial displays.

By the mid-1970s, while El Toro expanded to 4,700 acres and kept almost a hundred jets in the air each day, it was subjected to village creep. To reduce jet noise and expand crash zones—there were twenty-six accidents between 1964 and 1974—new crash zones were drawn in 1972, 1976, 1970, with the Marines then asking for a two-mile green belt in which no structure built would exceed fifty feet in height. Today Orange County businessmen are trying to have El Toro and Tustin (q.v.) as well removed or be granted joint use of the sites as commercial airports. Thus far the answer has been that the relocation of these stations would cost between \$1 billion and \$3 billion, even if a suitable alternative location could be found. Moreover, in 1981, among persons responding to a questionnaire about the noise, safety, and economic impact of the station, 78

percent of those living near the station replied that jet flights should continue "regardless."

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EWA, OAHU, HAWAII, MARINE CORPS AIR STATION, 1941–1952

In Hawaiian, "Ewa" connotes imperfection. In the vernacular of the natives living west of Honolulu, it is pronounced "Eva," with a short "e" and a Latin "a." The station, of course, belied the local interpretation.

In the early 1930s the Navy secured a lease to a 700-acre tract at Ewa, about seventeen miles west of Pearl Harbor and northeast of Barbers Point (q.v.). There it built a dirigible mooring mast and an oil-surfaced 1,500-by-150-foot emergency landing field. With the mooring mast not needed because all the dirigibles had been wrecked, the national defense construction program, begun late in the fall of 1939, provided for runways at Ewa for use by the Marine Corps. By 28 January 1940 the landing mat was reported available for use, and on the next day, between the hours of 1330 and 1500 daily, it was made available for carrier landing practice. On 3 February all the planes of Marine Air Group 2 (MAG-2) prepared to fly to Ewa from Ford Island (*see* Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and Support Bases), a movement completed by the thirteenth. In June, after a Link trainer had been provided, Ewa acquired Headquarters and Service Squadron 2, and a bombing, fighting, scouting, and utility squadron. The designation was changed to MAG-21 on 28 July. By this time the original runway had been extended and a new cross-runway had been completed. In addition, 100 officers and 800 men billeted to the *Enterprise* had moved into two groups of barracks capable of housing 3,000 men. There were also a 100-man BOQ, a storehouse, shops, a dispensary, mess facilities, and an operations building. Last, before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, two additional runways, a warm-up platform, and a hangar were provided.

On 18 November 1941 Lt. Col. Lewie G. Merritt, USMC, the original commanding officer, was billeted to duty at the U.S. Embassy in London and was succeeded by Lt. Col. Claude A. Larkin. On 7 December Japanese aircraft struck