



# MARINE FIGHTER ATTACK SQUADRON 122

## “The Crusaders”



Marine Fighter Squadron 122 was commissioned on 1 March 1942 at Camp Kearny, California. Originally the “Candystrippers”, the squadron was organized and trained under its FIRST Commanding Officer, Major I. I. Brackett. Outfitted with the F4F “Wildcat,” the squadron embarked on its FIRST combat tour in October 1942. Throughout 1942-43, the squadron conducted combat operations on Espiritu Santo, at Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, and during the Rendova and Munda campaigns. During April 1943, under the command of Major “Pappy” Boyington, VMF-122 transitioned to the F4U-1 “Corsair”, and accounted for 35½ kills. The squadron ended its first combat tour, returning to Miramar, California in August 1943.

Embarking on the USS HOLLANDIA for its second combat deployment during July 1944, the squadron was outfitted with new Goodyear F4G-1A aircraft. The “Candystrippers” operated from Peleliu Air Facility, conducting combat operations over Yap, Palau Islands, Pulo Anna, Eomegan, and Abappaomegan. Their last combat mission of the war was a strike on Korror on 1 Aug 1945.

The squadron remained at Peleliu until reporting to MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina in February 1946. Deactivated between July and October 1946, VMF-122 was reactivated and received the FH-1 “Phantom” in November 1947, becoming the FIRST Marine Squadron to employ jet-propelled aircraft. Using the FH-1 the squadron formed the Marine’s FIRST and ONLY aerial demonstration team, the Marine Phantoms” or “Flying Leathernecks”. This group toured the country for almost two years, and disbanded with the introduction of F2H-2 “Banshee”. Assigned to USS ORISKANY, VMF-122 became the FIRST Marine jet squadron to be both day and night qualified for carrier operations. In July 1952, the squadron transitioned to the F9F-4 “Panther”. Later equipped with the more powerful F9F-5 the deployed aboard the USS CORAL SEA. Following the Mediterranean Sea cruise in 1953, the squadron was assigned to MAG-24 at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina.

In January 1954, VMF-122 was the FIRST Marine Squadron equipped with the FJ-2 “Fury”. With a change of aircraft, the squadron adopted the distinctive Candystriper insignia and tail markings. VMF-122 became the FIRST Navy or Marine squadron to carrier qualify in the “Fury” while preparing for another cruise aboard the USS CORAL SEA. Upon completion of the cruise, the squadron returned to Cherry Point and reequipped with the FJ-3. From September 1955 through December 1956 the squadron took part in several mini-deployments aboard the USS FORRESTAL and USS SARATOGA.

VMF-122 relocated to MCAS Beaufort, SC in September 1957. In December 1957 the squadron became the fastest squadron in the Marine Corps with delivery of the FIRST F8U-1’s (F-8A) “Crusader” by Chance-Vought. A new patch was designed to go with the new aircraft and VMF-122 officially became know as the “Crusaders”. In September 1959, VMF-122 became the FIRST Marine F8U squadron to qualify aboard a carrier, the USS INDEPENDENCE. In December 1959, while searching “second hand” shops in lower Manhattan, Lieutenant Desmond F. Browne procured the most famous “Crusader”, Mach-Altus I. In October 1962, the “Crusaders received the F-8E aircraft, and was designated All Weather (AW) capable. The squadron deployed to Key West, Florida during the Cuban missile crisis, setting strip alert and flying combat air patrols until December 1962.

During 1964, the Crusaders deployed to Atsugi, Japan for one year, returning to MCAS El Toro, California in January 1965. At El Toro, VMF(AW) 122 transitioned to the F-4B “Phantom” and was designated Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 122. VMFA-122 deployed to the Republic of Vietnam in August 1967, operating from Da Nang Air Base. The “Crusaders” flew their FIRST combat sorties on 1 September 1967. For the next five months the squadron flew 2540 sorties and delivered 4800 tons of ordnance. In February 1968, supporting the Khe Sahn siege, the squadron accrued 745 flight hours during 629 combat sorties and dropped 1300 tons of ordnance. VMFA-122 rotated to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan in September 1968, returning to Vietnam in the summer of 1969, at Marine Air Base Chu Lai.

Following a distinguished combat record, the “Crusaders” were assigned to MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii in September 1970. The “Crusaders” were then ordered to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan as a Joint Chiefs of Staff directive to counter a North Vietnamese offensive against South Vietnam. The squadron returned to Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii on 27 December 1972.

On 14 August 1974, VMFA-122 was placed in a CADRE status in anticipation of becoming the Marine Corps’ FIRST F-14A squadron. With the decision not to accept the “Tomcat” into the Marine Corps inventory, VMFA-122 was reactivated at MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina and refitted with the F-4J. On 25 September 1985, VMFA-122 flew its last F-4 sortie, completing 20 years of service as a F-4 “Phantom” squadron.

On 22 January 1986, the “Crusaders” began a new era with the acceptance of its first F/A-18A “Hornet”. Throughout the 1980’s, 1990’s, and into the 2000’s VMFA-122 conducted multiple training deployments to Europe and throughout the United States. In October 2001, the “Crusaders” increased their combat capabilities by transitioning to the F/A18C. The squadron participated in the Unit Deployment Program (UDP), completing eleven deployments to the Western Pacific. In January 2005 the “Crusaders” continued the UDP rotation, deploying to Iwakuni, Japan, an adventure which this cruisebook hopes to record.