U.S. Navy Establishes First Super Hornet Squadron

- The nation's first Super Hornet squadron - VFA-122 - was established at Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif., on Jan. 15. The newly formed squadron is a Fleet Readiness Squadron responsible for aircrew and maintenance training in the Navy's newest tactical aircraft.

"The Super Hornet is exactly what we in naval aviation have asked for and what will keep us relevant as a war-fighting entity well into the 21st Century," said Commander Mark Fox. Fox is the first commanding officer of VFA-122.

The new squadron currently consists of about 60 personnel but is expected to grow to more than 500 over the next several years.

"Our mission is to train Super Hornet aviators and maintainers to project power from the sea, to put fuzed ordnance on target, the first pass, on time, day or night, anywhere," explained Fox. "There is an enormous amount of very detailed work that must be done to prepare for this airplane to go to sea and to operate as part of the fleet."

Beginning in May, VFA-122 aircrew and maintenance personnel will support Navy squadron VX-9 with operational testing of the Super Hornet at Naval Air Station China Lake, Calif., Operational Evaluation (OPEVAL) will consist of more than 800 flights in a six-month period. At the conclusion of OPEVAL, five of the Super Hornets used in operational testing and evaluation will go to Lemoore to begin the process of training the instructors.

"Our next major milestone is in June of 2000 when we say we are ready to train and the first class starts flying," says Fox. "We intend to make this training system the very best we can."

Fox says the first class will graduate from VFA-122 in the early part of 2001. Graduates are destined for the first fleet squadron of operational Super Hornets which is slated to be a transitioned F-14 Tomcat squadron on the East Coast. The first Super Hornet fleet deployment is scheduled for spring 2002.

VFA-122 has a distinguished history that dates back to the Korean War. Attack Squadron (VA-122), established on June 30, 1959, trained replacement pilots and maintenance technicians in the A-1 Skyraider. With the retirement of the Navy's Skyraiders in 1967, the squadron transitioned to the A-7 Corsair until it was decommissioned in April 1991.

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