

Flying Eagles Return to Fly Super Hornets

By LCdr. Rick Burgess, USN (Ret.)

The fleet introduction of the Boeing-built F/A-18E/F *Super Hornet* strike fighter has begun with the creation of the Navy's first *Super Hornet* fleet readiness squadron (FRS). The unit, Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 122, stood up at NAS Lemoore, Calif., home to most of the Pacific Fleet's *Hornet* squadrons.

The VFA-122 *Flying Eagles*—officially established on 1 October 1998—hosted a ceremony on 15 January 1999 to celebrate its establishment and the entry of the *Super Hornet* for fleet service. Vice Admiral Michael L. Bowman, Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, was the keynote speaker at the ceremonies. Among the other dignitaries in attendance were Rear Admiral John B. Nathman, Director of Air Warfare in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations; Captain Danny L. Clarkson, Commander, Strike Fighter Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet; and Patrick J. Finneran, Jr., vice president and general manager of the Boeing Company's F/A-18 programs. An F/A-18F development aircraft was on hand for the ceremonies, painted with the markings of VFA-122.

The first commanding officer of VFA-122 is Commander Mark I. Fox, a veteran *Hornet* squadron commander and a combat veteran of the Gulf War who shot down an Iraqi MiG-21 fighter on the opening day of Operation Desert Storm.

The *Flying Eagles* pick up the name and traditions of Attack

Right and below, Commander Mark I. Fox speaks to the guests and crew of the first *Super Hornet* squadron, VFA-122.



PH2(NAC) Michael Lee

PH2 Robert O'Dell

Squadron 122, which was disestablished in 1991, but the squadrons are not connected by lineage.

VFA-122 is scheduled to support Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 9 as it conducts operational evaluation (OPEVAL) of the *Super Hornet* from May through September 1999. Following OPEVAL, five of the seven-aircraft *Super Hornet* test fleet will be turned over to VFA-122. The *Flying Eagles* are slated to accept delivery of 34 of the first 62 production *Super Hornets* (12 single-seat F/A-18Es and 22 two-seat F/A-18Fs) over the next three years. The training of students is expected to begin in June 2000, and the

squadron staff is expected to reach more than 500 personnel by 2002.

Between 1999 and 2004, a total of 92 *Super Hornets* are scheduled to be added to Strike Fighter Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet in Phase I. These aircraft will begin replacing F-14 *Tomcat* fighters in four squadrons, currently based at NAS Oceana, Va. These transitions and the growth of VFA-122 are expected to bring 1,856 active-duty personnel and 120 civilians to Lemoore. The first operational *Super Hornet* squadrons are expected to deploy by spring 2002. Phase II of the *Super Hornet* transition, from 2005 to 2010, will involve replacing the 72 F/A-18C/D *Hornets* at Lemoore with F/A-18E/Fs. ✈