Photo by: Cpl Paula M. Fitzgerald

A CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter prepares to receive fuel from a KC-130 Hercules aircraft during an aerial refueling exercise. The helicopter belonged to Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 772, a reserve squadron from Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, that served with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

First, sea-based helicopters transported supplies to Pakistan, where cargo was transferred to VMGR-234 and VMGR-352 aircraft for transport to Afghanistan. Detachment A, VMGR-234, led by Lieutenant Colonel

Span of Operations by Marine air and ground units in the early stages of Operation Enduring Freedom compared to distances in the Continental United States.

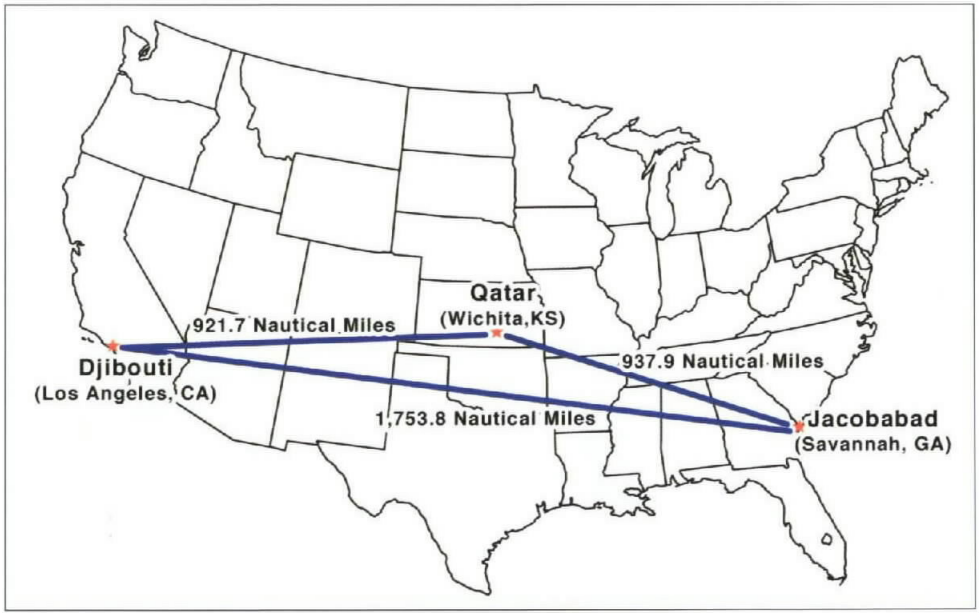

Photo by: Cpl Paula M. Fitzgerald

Marines from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 772 serving with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, January 2003.

LtCol Bradley S. James, Detachment Commander, VMGR-234.

Bradley S. James consisted of four aircraft and flew to Pakistan on 25 February 2002, where they joined the Marines and aircraft from VMGR-352. Both VMGR-234 and VMGR-352 supported ground forces in Afghanistan from the 11th and 13th Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs). The primary mission of the KC-130 aircraft was

KC-130s supporting operations in Operation Enduring Freedom.

A KC-130 supports Operation ANACONDA at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, March 2002.

refueling, but it also provided tactical airlift support.

Aircrews in Afghanistan were often targeted by small arms and rocket-propelled grenades at Jacobabad, Pakistan, and Bagram, Afghanistan presenting significant challenges to their mission.

Most flights were conducted at night, increasing the risks to aircraft and personnel alike. Lieutenant Colonel James noted that, "most of the missions were [flown] at night so night vision [capability] was essential for flight

Maintenance team from VMGR-234, Jacobabad, Pakistan, March 2002.

Col Christopher J. Gunther, Commanding Officer, 13th MEU (SOC), talks to the Marines of the Detachment from VMGR-234. Detachment Commander, LtCol Bradley S. James (left), and Maintenance Chief, MSgt Kevin K. Mitchell, listen.

crews who would bring the supplies another 500 miles inland." Missions generally took six to eight hours to complete and Marines usually worked 12-hour shifts.

The reserve KC-130 aircraft were 25 years younger than airplanes with active duty units, and they had night vision goggle capability. The Marines of VMGR-234 spent time working with their active duty counterparts training aircrews on the night vision goggles. Detachment A, VMGR-234, had a group of very experienced pilots due to active duty experience and civilian work in commercial aviation.

While Detachment A, VMGR-234, was engaged in supporting missions in the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia, the remainder of the squadron supported the intense training requirements of stateside Marine and

Main hanger for KC-130 detachment, Jacobabad, Pakistan, March 2002.

Two CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters receive fuel from a KC-130 Hercules aircraft while each carries two vehicles during operations around Djibouti, January 2003. The helicopters belong to HMH-772, a reserve squadron from Willow Grove , Pennsylvania, attached to the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) in support of the global war on terrorism.

Army units. During the pre-deployment training and subsequent deployment of the Camp Lejeune-based 24th MEU, VMGR-234 provided fixed wing and helicopter aerial refueling and administrative airlift support. At the same time, VMGR-234 served an integral role in providing helicopter aerial refueling support for the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

In addition to the demand for KC-130 aircraft and crews from the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, heavy lift CH-53E helicopters were needed. Two reserve Marine heavy lift squadrons—HMH-769 and HMH-772—were activated in January 2002 and provided support to active duty forces.

While many active duty squadrons from Camp Pendleton-based Marine Aircraft Group 16 were overseas in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, HMH-769 filled the flight demands required to sustain the tempo of active duty operations. On short notice, HMH-769 augmented the aviation combat element of the 11th MEU with two aircraft and 17 Marines. As the 11th MEU prepared for departure, the Marines and aircraft of HMH-769 joined the composite squadron of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 166 (HMM-166) without participation in the normal six-month pre-deployment training routine. To their credit, the Marines from HMH-769 flew onto the USS *Belleau Wood* (LHA 3) as the ship departed San Diego for the deployment.

As the Global War on Terrorism expanded beyond Afghanistan, suspected terrorist training activity was significant in an area known as the Horn of Africa. During the deployment of the 11th MEU, HMH-769 provided CH-53E helicopter and aircrew support to the multinational Special Operations Force in Djibouti, Africa, for counter-terrorist operations in the Horn of Africa. The squadron participated in flight operations with the United States Air Force's Sikorsky MH-53H Pavelow helicopters supporting Special Forces units. It was necessary for the CH-53Es to stay ashore for this three-month mission. In addition to fighting the Global War on Terrorism, the 11th MEU provided humanitarian relief in East Timor. The Marines and aircraft of HMH-769 transported building materials and troops in support of the humanitarian operations in this region.

Upon activation, the Marines of HMH-772 moved from their training center at the Naval Air Station, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, to the Marine Corps Air Station,

New River, North Carolina. Due to the substantial demand for additional heavy lift helicopters, HMH-772 reinforced the aviation combat element for the 24th MEU. In contrast to the experience HMH-769 had with the 11th MEU, HMH-772 participated in the six-month pre-deployment training cycle with the 24th MEU.

Upon arrival at the New River Marine Corps Air Station, the squadron immediately integrated with the composite medium lift squadron, HMM-263, and began the pre-deployment training cycle, which requires a Marine expeditionary unit to perform a spectrum of missions before receiving the rating of Special Operations Capable. Training missions include amphibious and helicborne raids, urban warfare operations, tactical recovery of downed aircraft and personnel, riot control, embassy reinforcement and evacuation, non-combatant evacuations, and humanitarian assistance. During this period, a team comes together comprised of the Navy's amphibious squadron and the Marine expeditionary unit and conducts a series of training exercises. Many of these exercises are conducted from naval shipping as the team performs ship-to-shore operations by aircraft and amphibious vehicles.

Prior to deployment with the 24th MEU, the CH-53E detachment provided by HMH-772 was reduced from eight helicopters to six. The aircraft and Marines that remained on standby at New River served an integral role in providing operational training support to the II Marine Expeditionary Force. The rear element of HMH-

KC-130 Marine crew member at Bagram airfield during Operation ANACONDA, March 2002.

772 strengthened the heavy lift capability of the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, which provided the aviation support to all II Marine Expeditionary Force operational requirements along the east coast. These included: expeditionary warfare capability demonstrations for congress, flag officers, and foreign dignitaries; logistical and heavy lift support for local training exercises; and participation in joint testing and evaluation missions with the U.S. Air Force at Eglin Air Force Base in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

The rear element of HMH-772 also provided operational relief to active duty CH-53E squadrons located at the New River air station. This allowed the active duty squadrons time for extensive maintenance on their airframes and the incorporation of much needed technical modifications.

In late August 2002, a detachment of six aircraft and personnel from HMH-772 serving as part of the composite air squadron of the 24th MEU, traveled to the Mediterranean Sea as the designated landing force for the U.S. Navy's Sixth Fleet. The 24th MEU participated in several major exercises including a multinational operation called Dynamic Response 2002. During the operation, HMH-772 detachment flew 177 sorties in mountainous environments under all weather conditions taking part in missions ranging from humanitarian support operations in remote mountain villages to logistical resupply at military border outposts.

As terrorist activities increased in the Horn of Africa, the 24th MEU moved from the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal and Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden in early November 2002. The heavy lift aircraft of the HMH-772 detachment were flown to the Ambouli International Airport at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, and assigned the mission of supporting counter-terrorist forces.

In the process of taking the fight to the enemy in this part of the world, great demand was placed on Marine air command and control systems for the direction of Marine aviation and protection of allied troops and aircraft from terrorist strikes. The United States Central Command needed additional early warning command and control support and received it from MACS-2. Upon the completion of its deployment to the Middle East, MACS-2 was relieved by MACS-24 in September 2002.

In the summer and fall of 2002, a combined joint task force was established under the leadership of Major General John F. Sattler, USMC. Major General Sattler was the commanding general of the 2d Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, when he was named as the commander of what became known as Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa. The mission of the task

force was to detect, deter, and destroy transnational terrorism in an area defined by the Department of Defense as the air space, land areas, and coastal waters of Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Yemen.

This presented a unique challenge to the 24th MEU, as it required the amphibious force to provide support to both the task force and training exercises Operation

Marines from Company A, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, return from a night patrol, May 2003.

Image Nautilus and Operation Iron Magic in the United Arab Emirates. The amphibious squadron split its force meeting both requirements and straining the distribution of the MEU's heavy lift aircraft capability. The aircraft and Marines of HMH-772 provided a detachment in Djibouti in support of Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa while the remainder of HMH-772 remained with

LtCol Wiliam M. Brandenburg follows Gen Thomas R. Franks, Commanding General, Central Command, during the general's visit with the Command Logistics Element, Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.

the portion of the amphibious squadron tasked with the training exercises in the United Arab Emirates.

The flight operations conducted in Djibouti required the integration of the HMH-772 detachment with elements of other American services. Joint training was conducted with Army, Air Force, and Navy special operations teams. This training consisted of the following: rapid live fire exercises; low-light level flying with night vision goggles conducting insertions and extractions; dual point external lifts of high mobility multi-wheeled vehicles (humvees) with multiple aircraft during radio silence; simultaneous aerial refueling in support of long range missions; special insertion and extraction training; airborne sniper platforms; and dissimilar aircraft flights with the Air Force MH-53M Pave Low helicopters, using them as pathfinders in mountainous terrain. This enabled the CH-53Es to fly in mountainous terrain during all weather conditions.

This training built a cohesive team and enhanced the development of standard operating procedures for the task force, which were used in future classified operations involving the HMH-772 detachment. Ultimately, this training produced a joint team capable of providing highly effective support in conducting counter-terrorist operations in the Horn of Africa region.

Supporting the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, was a command logistics element established and

Marines from the staff of Command Logistics Element, Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.

Photo by: Cpl Andrew W. Miller

MajGen John F. Sattler, (left), Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa Commander, greets MajGen (select) John J. McCarthy, Commanding General, 4th Marine Division, April 2003. CJTF-HOA was established to detect, disrupt and defeat terrorism in the Horn of Africa region.

Armed and ready, a Marine sentry stands watch for the Command Logistics Element.

Photo by: Cpl Matthew J. Apprendi

Col Mario LaPaix, commander, Command Logistics Element, Marine Central Command, reviews Djibouti's military police force during a ceremony honoring LaPaix for his efforts to solidify strong relations with Djibouti.

staffed with a large contingent of Marine reserves and led by a reserve officer, Colonel Mario La Paix. The reserve units that comprised the command logistics element were the following: Military Police Detachment, Headquarters, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing from Belle Chase, Louisiana; Detachment A, Headquarters and Service, 4th Force Service Support Group from Marietta, Georgia; Headquarters Detachment, 4th Force Service Support Group from New Orleans, Louisiana; Company A, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, 4th Marine Division from Grand Rapids, Michigan; Weapons Company, 1st Battalion 24th Marines, 4th Marine Division from Perrysburg, Ohio; Anti-Armor Section, Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, 4th Marine Division from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma; and Detachment A, Headquarters and Service Company, 4th Combat Engineer Battalion, 4th Marine Division from Baltimore, Maryland.

LtGen Earl B. Hailston (far left) Commanding General Marine Forces, Pacific and Marine Forces Central Command, visits the Command Logistic Element in Djibouti.

Prior to taking over for MWSG-37 at Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar, California, MWSG-47 Headquarters established an aerial port of embarkation for the Marines and equipment assigned to the command logistics element for the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa. Marine Wing Support Group 47 provided all necessary

The Marines of the Combined Logistics Command Element work with the local Fire department at Camp Lemonier.

transportation, billeting, food service, and communication needs while coordinating pre-deployment training requirements for the command logistics element. Additionally, MWSG-47 worked in conjunction with Air Force units located at the Air National Guard Base in Selfridge, Michigan, loading two Air Force C-17 aircraft with 17 vehicles and 20 cargo pallets.

The command logistics element assumed responsibility for base operations at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, on 26 January 2003. The command logistics element renovated the 88-acre former French Foreign Legion camp, constructing additional living spaces, working quarters, and a communication network from January to June