The Black Sheep Squadron: A case study in U.S. Marine Corps' innovations in close air support

Abstract
United States Marine Corps Fighter Squadron 214 (VMF-214), the "Black Sheep," is perhaps the most widely recognized fighter squadron of the United States military. The Marine Corps, by tradition and doctrine, assigns as top priority to its air units, air support of ground forces, or close air support (CAS). Ironically, during World War II, VMF-214 flew only one mission that could qualify for CAS among the hundreds of combat missions it flew. VMF-214 instead gained its notoriety from air-to-air combat, or "dogfighting." In a general sense, this was the case for all of Marine fighter aviation. Five years after the end of World War II, almost to the day, VMF-214 was back again in combat, this time in Korea. It was the first Marine Corps unit, ground or air, to see combat in that war. Black Sheep pilots were still flying the same aircraft that they flew at the end of World War II, the F-4U 'Corsair' and most of its pilots were World War II veterans. In Korea, instead of aerial duels, Marine pilots flew predominately CAS missions; that was their specialty. In this relatively short time, it appears that a shift in priorities in Marine fighter aviation had occurred beyond the exigencies of two different wars. The Black Sheep and other Marine squadrons were prepared to implement their superior CAS system from the beginning. Consequently, Marine aviation became widely recognized for its CAS capabilities and outshone the U.S. Air Force, and made the U.S. Army long for a similar type of air support. Using this most famous squadron to represent all of Marine fighter aviation, this dissertation depicts first how this unmatched close air support system was developed, and secondly its manifestation in the Korean War through documenting VMF-214’s activities in that war. Although Marine Corps CAS has its roots in Marine Corps doctrine,
Marine Attack Squadron 214 (VMA-214) is a United States Marine Corps fighter squadron consisting of AV-8B Harrier (V/STOL) jets. The squadron is based at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona and is under the command of Marine Aircraft Group 13 (MAG-13) and the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (3rd MAW). The squadron is best known as the Black Sheep of World War II fame and for one of its commanding officers, Colonel Gregory "Pappy" Boyington US Marine Corps - Marine Attack Squadron 214 VMA-214 'Black Sheep'.

STATUS AV-8B Harrier II (VMA-214) at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California - February 2015. AV-8B Harrier II (VMA-214) - February 2015. AV-8B Harrier II (VMA-214) - February 2015. The call sign "Black Sheep" was chosen by the squadron to commemorate the unusual way in which the Squadron had been formed. The pilots ranged from experienced combat veterans, with several air-to-air victories to their credit, to new replacement pilots from the United States. F4U Corsair (US Navy/ US Marine Corps). Known as the "Whistling Death", the F4U Corsair was an original design that became a staple for Marines in the Pacific. Originally designed as a fighter for the Navy, the Corsair was initially considered too dangerous for carrier use due to initial difficulties in developing a landing procedure. Fortunately, this issue provided another branch with a considerable amount of Corsairs- the United States Marines. In the realm of Close Air Support, the Corsair was a record holder- The Corsair bore the brunt of U.S. fighter-bomber missions, delivering 15,621 tons (14,171 tonnes) of bombs during the war (70% of total bombs dropped by U.S. fighters during the war).