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,
This is a list of all of the active squadrons that exist in the United States Marine Corps, sorted by type. Most squadrons have changed names and designations many times over the years, so they are listed by their current designation. To see Marine Aviation units sorted by command hierarchy, see aviation combat element. The basic tactical and administrative unit of United States Marine Corps aviation is the squadron. Fixed-wing aircraft squadrons (heavier than air) and tiltrotor squadrons are denoted tradition and the pre-World War II small wars, the focus of this work is on the forces, personalities, policies and technologies in World War II and especially the years after, that turned the Black Sheep, and all Marine fighter pilots, into CAS specialists.