



VMGR-352 Squadron Car



A story about a patch, a car and a group of “Battle Herk” Marines



The story that adorns the following pages is a collective of memories, stories, and historical input of many. We would like to thank all who have made submissions and assisted us in the write and continuous re-wright of the Lincoln's history and continued use today. A special thank you to CAPT Paul Krug, USN (Ret.) "Raider '26" (1985-1990) for his shared love for this project and most notably for his assistance in getting this edited documented history to print and allowing us to share it on our webpage for all to read.

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Personal Photo

Executive Summary

Introduction

The story of a 1969 Lincoln Continental, which served as the squadron car for Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352), is narrated in this document. This story chronicles the history of the squadron and its car from the 1980's through the resurrection of the vehicle in 2021. The format of this account is derived from a television storyboard created during early fundraising efforts in 2016.

Objective

The objective of this narrative is to portray the vehicle's rich and colorful past, the car's relationship with VMGR-352 as both experience peacetime as well as wartime operations, promulgate the squadron's distinguished history after transitioning from a trans-oceanic aerial refueler unit to a multi-mission tactical squadron, place the squadrons notable achievements in historical and cultural context, highlight the decline and eventual resurrection of the squadron car, and advocate an employment and sustainment campaign.

Conclusion

The "Raider Mobile" or "Tanker Lincoln" may be the most famous and long-lived squadron car in the US Military. The epic story of the car is closely entwined with the Raiders through nearly four decades. From its purchase in 1984 through its current history in 2021, the vehicle personified VMGR-352. The name Operation RESTORE TANKER LINCOLN was originally given to a proactive Course of Action (COA) with the goal of getting the squadron car repaired to at least a museum quality static display at a minimum or, if able, to restore or replace a vehicle to a fully mission capable (FMC) status. That has happened, and since the delivery back to the squadron in 2021, the iconic Lincoln is still in use today.

Recommendation (Bottom Line up Front): That VMGR-352 support and sustain a squadron car in support of squadron professional and social objectives.

The Story of the 1969 Lincoln Continental Tanker Lincoln/ Raider Mobile



http://bluejacket.com/usmc/images/kc130_f14_.jpg

VMGR-352 KC-130s conducting aerial refueling of Navy F-14s and a lone Marine F-4 in the early 80's. From left to right are aircraft 014, 752, 240, and 572. QB 572 was the "tail number" assigned to the squadron car.

Prologue: Early 1980's

By 2011, Marine KC-130s over Afghanistan, armed with the Hercules Airborne Weapons Kit, designated as "Harvest Hawk", had become the Close Air Support (CAS) "platform of choice" for coalition ground troops in Afghanistan as reported by several publications. It is hard to believe that 30 years earlier, Marine KC-130s were fighting for a role, even for their very existence.

The 1980s were a time of transition for the USMC KC-130 Community. The Air Force had procured the KC-10 with the mission of inter-service strategic tanking. Marine Corps Aviation lost the Trans-Pacific (TRANSPAC) air-refueling mission that had been the mainstay for the Marine Herk. VMGR-352 needed to return to its tactical Korean and Vietnam War roots as well as provide on-call support for Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs). Missions such as battlefield illumination, aerial delivery, tactical aerial refueling, short and austere field logistics operations that utilized low-level tactics to counter the Soviet era threat became the new norm. A group of young officers, supported by leaders battle tested in Vietnam, eagerly embraced these changes. This group sought to completely change the squadron image. If Ronald Reagan could turn around America, VMGR-352 would boost the KC-130's standing within Marine Aviation. They started by inspiring morale with a new squadron name, a new logo and patch, as well as buying a squadron car inspired by the 1980's cult film "The Blues Brothers".



<https://www.ihavenet.com/nfl-superbowl-XVIII-raiders-redskins.html>
1983 Super Bowl Champion LA Raiders



Super Bowl XVIII Pennant

Coincidental with the energy occurring at VMGR-352, the Oakland Raiders moved to Los Angeles. The Raiders Football Franchise exuded confidence and was always entertaining. They were the scourge of the NFL, winning big in Super Bowls, while portraying a rogue image that excited their loyal fans. Mark "Myk" Mykityshyn was a newly minted Marine KC-130 pilot, who had played football at the Naval Academy, and was coaching the squadron flag football team in 1984. He also believed that the squadron needed to get away from its stagnant non-tactical image. Even VMGR squadron insignias were symbolic yet confusing. VMGR-352 Marines wanted a more dynamic symbol and name to capture the growing sense of purpose.

A Name, a patch and a car help spark a transformation



VMGR-152 Patch then and now



VMGR-252 Patch then and now



VMGR-352 Patch circa 1970s

Myk pondered whether the squadron could use the logo, name, and colors from the meanest and most rebellious team in the National Football League as the basis for the squadron insignia? At the same time, this was the gridiron team with the trademark slogan "Commitment To Excellence"; exactly the command climate that Junior Officers wanted to create and emulate at VMGR-352.



"Jolly Roger" flag with LA Raider motto



LA Raider Logo

Myk with the help of a few others, designed a new squadron logo based on the rogue, and winning, football team, and then pitched it to the Los Angeles Raiders business office for the authorized use of the Raider name and logo. The original Raiders squadron insignia design and the final letter of approval from the LA football franchise are shown below.



THE LOS ANGELES

330 CENTER STREET • EL SEGUNDO, CALIFORNIA 90245 • (213) 322-3451
PRIDE AND POISE



White AREA - METALLIC SILVER
Black AREA - HIGH GLOSS BLACK

February 8, 1985

Lt. Mark Mykityshyn
U.S. Marine Corps
Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352
Marine Aircraft Group 13
3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, FMFPac
MCAS El Toro, Santa Ana, CA 902709-6028

Dear Lt. Mykityshyn:

We would be delighted to have you use our name on your airplane and on flight clothing. The only restriction that must be imposed is that none of the articles with the name and emblem be used for profit or resale.

We wish you the best of luck and are equally honored to have those in the VMGR-352 use our name.

Sincerely,

Julie Blosser
Julie Blosser
Speakers Bureau

Copies of the the original drawing and letter were provided by the Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

To this day, the Raider Patch has never been officially recognized as the official insignia of VMGR-352. As it turns out, the approving authority is not Headquarters, Marine Corps, but the CNO. With Marine Aviation funded under Naval Aviation, the Naval Insignia Board, under the auspices of the CNO, presides as the ultimate arbitrator of Navy and Marine squadron emblems.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350

IN REPLY REFER TO
OP-05D2
Ser 4U394570
17 August 1984

From: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-05D)
To: Commanding Officer, Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352,
Marine Aircraft Group 13, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, FMF, Pacific,
MCAS El Toro, Santa Ana, California 92709

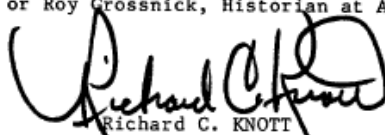
Ref: (a) CO, VMGR-352 ltr, 5030 3 of 11 June 1984
(b) OPNAVINST 5030.4D of 27 Apr 1984

Encl: (1) Current insignia of VMGR-352

1. In response to reference (a), insignia files held by this office and those of the Marine Corps History Center indicate no official approval of VMGR-352's current insignia.

2. Enclosure (1), forwarded by reference (a), was reviewed by the Naval Aviation Insignia Board on 15 August 1984. Although the proposed insignia design appears to be satisfactory, it must be submitted in accordance with reference (b) via the appropriate chain of command before an official approval can be authorized.

3. Further questions about the approval of insignia for aviation commands may be directed to me or Roy Crossnick, Historian at AUTOVON, 288-4407/4355.


Richard C. KNOTT
By direction

Courtesy of the Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division



Revised VMGR-352 Squadron Patch displayed to the left. Using the LA Raiders logo as a template, Myk retained the silver and black colors and substituted a Marine Officers Mameluke Sword along with a NCO sword for the two pirate cutlasses. A frontal view of a Herk in flight replaced the football players head and the shield shape was incorporated inside a standard naval squadron patch. He retained the RAIDERS name in the upper center position. The LA Raiders not only enthusiastically approved but offered team support including cheerleaders that could attend events for the squadron. Squadron leadership under Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Major endorsed the new insignia as well, and was also supportive of his junior officers as they purchased a squadron car.

1984-1988 : The Big Eighties



Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi star as "Elmwood and Jake Blues" in the 1980 movie "The Blues Brothers" produced by Universal Pictures, and directed by John Landis

1984-1986: A band of "Dress Blues Brothers" buy and operate a car

Ronald Reagan was president, morning had dawned in America, Jeff Spicoli was "totally gnarly", and people wanted their MTV. Concurrently, an El Toro based KC-130 Squadron exuded energy and a growing esprit de corps. Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) Major was serving his final months as squadron Commanding Officer (CO) of VMGR-352 when the car was purchased in 1984.

Bill "Abbs" Abby found a 1969 Lincoln Continental with "suicide doors" in Yorba Linda, CA through the Orange County Register newspaper. The original idea was to find and purchase a convertible, but the hard top looked mean and ready. Mike "Fergie" Ferguson, George "Wally" Walters and Abbs drove out and, eventually, procured the car for \$1200. Once purchased, Bill "Wild" Armishaw, Joseph "Chick" Kelenfy, "Doc" Olman, John "Z Man" Zeglin, Leo "Coon" Falcum, Rob "Spock" Lucy and the Mark Mykityshyn also split the cost. For \$150 apiece, these junior officers launched a squadron car. Inscribed on the car, the callsigns of the ten buyers were later etched in silver script. Coming off a six-month Okinawa detachment, Craig Laurie also kicked in for the vehicle. Fergie carried the car on his personal USAA insurance policy.

Before the Lincoln was emblazoned in its first livery, Chick Kelenfy drove the car at his wedding on June 30, 1984. The vehicle is displayed at the wedding before the initial design was applied.



Personal photo

Picture taken outside the MCAS El Toro Base Chapel. The recently purchased black Lincoln is visible to the right

The car was originally all black, including the vinyl top, with silver lettering. An American flag was displayed on the trunk as well as two large US national aircraft insignias on each rear quarter panel. “VMGR-352” was written on the trunk. “United States Marines”, with “VMGR-352” underneath, adorned the two suicide doors. Tail number “QB 572” was inscribed on the forward quarter panel with a red propeller danger symbol painted just forward of the front doors. Listed on the car were the ten original names just forward of the propeller danger symbol and behind the front tires:

- Left side
 “Fergie”- Mike Ferguson
 “Spock”- Robert Lucy
 “Coon”- Leo Falcam
 “Chick”- Joseph Kelenfy
 “Abbs”- Bill Abbey

- Right side
 “Myk”- Mark Mykityshyn
 “Wally”- George Walters
 “Doc”- Doc Olman
 “Z Man”- John Zeglin
 “Wild”- Bill Armishaw



Personal photo

Stars and Stripes adorned the trunk



Personal photo

Myk and Wally are photographed writing “Jake” and “Elwood” on their knuckles while dressed up for the part

In its first official role, the car was used to chauffeur LtCol Major and his wife to his farewell party. At the retirement party, the Raiders welcomed LtCol Thomas O’Malley, as the new CO. Skipper O’Malley would command the squadron from 1984 to 1986. LtCol O’Malley, followed by Skippers Ritchie and Bauernfeind were all very supportive of the squadron vehicle during their tenures in command. Their command support, along with the energy of several company grade officers who comprised the “Junior Officer Protection Association (JOPA)”, would set the stage for the “totally awesome” years of the Raider squadron car during the 1980’s.



Personal photo

"Blues Brothers", Mark "Myk" Mykityshyn (left) and George "Wally" Walters (right) used the car to take LtCol and Mrs. Major to their farewell shindig. Five of the original "plank holder" call signs are shown just aft of the front tire (from top to bottom): "Myk", "Wally", "Doc", "Z Man" and "Wild". "QB 572", the first KC-130 assigned to VMGR-352, was given to the car and is seen on the front corner.

The car was affectionately named the "Tanker Lincoln", often shortened to either the "Tanker" or the "Lincoln". It was used to drive down to NAS Miramar on Wednesday nights and to MCRD San Diego on Friday nights for happy hour. Squadron events, especially the annual Marine Corps Ball, also featured the car. "Fergie" Ferguson and "Wild Bill" Armishaw would assign duty drivers for all Tanker events to ensure an uneventful and safe return. At this time, a tradition was established using the squadron car in conjunction with the annual El Toro Airshow. The car would be placed next to the VMGR-352 squadron static display KC-130 in order to showcase the unit. Junior Officers, along with the assigned static display crew, would greet visitors and allow tours and pictures of both the Herk and the car. Over the years, thousands visited the combined exhibit.

As a fixture at El Toro Officer's Club, or O' Club, Friday happy hour, the Tanker Lincoln was normally parked right in front and the squadron's car unofficial parking space received some unwanted attention from higher headquarters between 1985 and 1986. On several occasions, the Marine Air Group 13 (MAG-13) Commander's Aide would wander around the club on a Friday night looking for anyone in a flight suit bearing a Raider patch and demand the vehicle's removal. Naturally, he was ignored. On one very public occasion, then-Col. Hearney (future General), the MAG-13 CO, personally ordered LtCol O'Malley to "move the car or else". Skipper O'Malley (later promoted to full Colonel despite the event) forcefully, but respectfully, non-concurred and it became accepted that the Tanker Lincoln could be parked in any space, assigned or otherwise. Over the following years, several Commanding Generals of the Third Marine Air Wing encouraged the practice and if attending a club function, with the car not present, would ask "Hey, where's the Tanker Lincoln tonight"?



Personal photo

The first Marine KC-130 Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System (LAPES) air delivery drop was performed by VMGR-352 at Dyess AFB, TX in July 1985. Lessons from the siege of Khe Sanh, where a VMGR-152 KC-130 was destroyed by ground fire and the Air Force flew multiple C-130 LAPES resupply sorties to the Marine firebase, motivated the squadron's Vietnam Era leadership to acquire and exercise the specialized cargo offload capability.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hollywood_Sign_PB050006.jpg

During its existence, MCAS El Toro, along with nearby Tustin, were the closest major Marine installations to the Hollywood-Burbank movie studios. Numerous films and television shows featured the Orange County location as a backdrop or utilized Marines there as extras. Disney Productions designed the first VMR-352 squadron patch during the Second World War.

1986-1988: Hollywood comes to VMGR-352

The Gipper is serving his second term, Lt. Pete “Maverick” Mitchell first felt the “need for speed” and the actress Farrah Fawcett is still considered “totally bodacious” (though despite persistent rumors, she never rode in the car). LtCol Jim Ritchie was the CO from 1986 to 1988. The squadron operated worldwide from the Aleutians to the Western Pacific, down to South America and out to the Mediterranean Sea. During this period, the Lincoln is in its prime; getting 60,000 yards to a gallon from its 25-gallon tank as it purrs down the I-5 freeway.

Of the original plank owners, Bill Armishaw, Mike Ferguson, Chick Kelenfy, Mark Mykityshyn and Leo Falcum are still serving at VMGR-352. Most would transfer or leave active duty shortly. At the request of Mike Ferguson, Paul Krug becomes the first “Keeper of the Car” from early 1986 to the late summer of 1988.

The car was instrumental in saving the VMGR-352 Officers fund which had landed in a \$2000 debt following the purchase of numerous squadron trinkets (t-shirts, mugs, etc.). At the 1986 and 1987 El Toro Airshows, visitors could have their picture taken for \$1 in front of the car, with a Herk in the background in order to help pay off the deficit. Attention brought by the car, attracted customers that eagerly purchased all the Raider logo items that had been accumulated. As always, the car was present for happy hour at the El Toro O’ Club, Marine Corps Balls and occasional forays down to NAS Miramar on Wednesday nights.



Personal photo

Local model pictured for an unofficial calendar photo shoot on the trunk of the Tanker Lincoln

In June 1986, the final scene of the Clint Eastwood film “Heartbreak Ridge” is filmed outside the Raider hangar. Aircraft 019, a KC-130 crew, and scores of squadron members and families were utilized as extras. Though wildly inaccurate, film shots with the Tanker Lincoln in the background do not make the final cut as the plot has returning Marines from Grenada, airlifted to Cherry Point on a Marine KC-130. The car with its conspicuous “United States Marines” and “VMGR-352” does not fit the storyline. (In actuality, the liberators of the American medical students at the St. George Hospital were troops from the 82nd Airborne based at Fort Bragg, NC. These troops would have participated in a homecoming celebration at Pope Air Force Base, NC. Marines from the 22nd Marine Amphibious Unit employed in Operation URGENT FURY, would have returned to the Saipan Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) located just offshore via helicopter and landing craft). But Hollywood was making a film about human drama not historical accuracy. The studio needed to keep the movie on schedule and on budget. The film’s closing scene and credits end with the large iconic Raider logo, emblazoned on the side of the VMGR-352 hangar, prominently featured in the background.



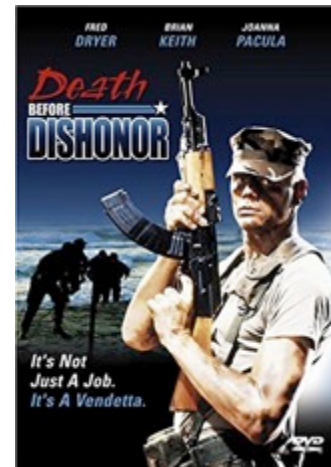
Photos above are scenes from the 1986 movie “Heartbreak Ridge” a Jay Weston Productions and the Malpas Company film, directed by Clint Eastwood, starring Clint Eastwood and Mario Van Peebles.

Actors Clint Eastwood and Mario Van Peebles exiting Aircraft 019 during the filming of the homecoming scene of Heartbreak Ridge



Crowd scene utilizing squadron personnel and their families. The squadron emblem on the hangar was the background for closing shots and final credits in the movie

In the winter of 1986, the late actor Brian Keith, himself a decorated Marine Corps Douglas SBD tail-gunner from the Second World War, takes a spin in the Tanker Lincoln while on location at the VMGR-352 hangar for the movie “Death before Dishonor”. Interior shots of Keith, sitting in one of the squadron offices, are used in the film which was released in 1987. Brian Keith was made an honorary Raider and given a squadron patch by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Ritchie.



Photos above are from the 1987 movie “Death Before Dishonor” produced by Balcor Film Investors, Bima, and MPI. Directed by Terry Leonard, and starring Fred Dryer and Brian Keith

Brian Keith played Col Haloran in the 1987 film “Death before Dishonor”. Keith had a storied career and was famous for the 1960’s hit sitcom “Family Affair”, the original “Parent Trap” and later in life, portraying Theodore Roosevelt in “The Wind and the Lion”.

Late 1986 saw the swan song of the post-Vietnam Unit Deployment Program (UDP) for VMGR-352 with a return of the final detachment from MCAS Futenma, Okinawa. A few months later, with the transfer of an aircraft apiece to both VMGR-152 and VMGR-253, the Raiders would become a 12-plane squadron.

One of the squadron officers, along with several other contributors across the 3rd Marine Air Wing (MAW), collaborated with a local photographer and shot pictures of 3rd MAW aircraft and different models at MCAS El Toro, MCAS Tustin, MCAS Camp Pendleton, and MCAS Yuma, creating an 18-month 3rd MAW Calendar. (A year did not cover the energy expended or scope of what was created). Done without any permission from either the Third MAW or any squadron leadership, the calendar was banned. In the 1987 unofficial 3rd MAW calendar, the Tanker Lincoln, with a local model, was featured in front of aircraft 014.



Personal photo

Picture from 1987 unofficial 3rd MAW Calendar. This photo, along with a picture of a pilot in front of a KC-130, were the two KC-130 shots used in the calendar

Building on the relationship that Mark Mykityshyn had earlier established with the Los Angeles Raiders football franchise, Paul Krug liaised with the Cheer Coordinator and the team would send “Raiderettes” to squadron Christmas parties and other events. One of these occasions was an annual Drug Awareness event inspired by Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign that was co-sponsored by the Orange County Sherriff’s Office. The squadron would host the event for all MCAS El Toro Marines and their families in the Raider Hangar. The Lincoln was dispatched to pick up the cheerleaders and then chauffeur them home after the event. Even today, the much-faded bumper stickers “We support a drug free America”, as well as “Don’t Wreck it with Drugs”, both next to Marine Corps emblems, were still displayed on the rear bumper of the as late as 2019.



AP File Photo

Raiderettes shown performing in black and silver. The squadron adopted "metallic silver" and "high gloss black" as the squadron colors in 1984.



Personal photo

Raider KC-130s refuel a strike package of Navy A-6Es
Intruders over the Bering Sea in 1987

Two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1987, the Cold War was in high gear. Soviet Tu-95 Bear bombers flew numerous incursions into the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that challenged F-15 Eagles of the Alaskan Air National Guard. The San Diego Union in a November 22, 1987 article published an article detailing that US Pacific Command (USPACOM) had deployed a composite group of Navy F-14s, A-6Es and VMGR-352 KC-130s, at various times, to Adak Island in the Aleutians in response to the Soviet probing. The combined Navy-Marine Corps aviation team conducted interceptions of the pesky Ruskies (Operation COYOTE) as well as mock strikes against Soviet Far East installations (Operation SHOOTING STAR). VMGR-352 gained prominence at the highest levels of the US military. Raider tankers served as the critical enabler of all-weather air operations that delivered a high-profile strategic message to the Kremlin. Navy Secretary John Lehman credited US naval aviation, operating in the "ice and fog" of the Northwest Pacific and North Atlantic just outside Russian territory, in demonstrating that any Soviet nuclear fleet asset could be held at risk. Later, senior Soviet military interviews revealed that this was a major factor that made clear to them that the Cold War was lost.

Meanwhile, back home, a certain senior officer is not happy as he realizes that Third MAW maintains only administrative control (ADCON) of the celebrated Raiders. He wanted "his tankers" and didn't like being told that they were tasked four echelons above his paygrade. Venting his frustration upon seeing the "Tanker Lincoln" parked in front of the El Toro Officers Club on a Friday night, he is heard to utter; "Since when does a bunch of g#*^%#d C-130 pukes rule a fighter base?"

In December 1987, the Tanker Lincoln is featured in a Squadron Christmas Card.



Personal photo

Then-Capt. Paul Krug (woodland utilities) delivering a Raiderette to the Executive Officer (XO) LtCol Ed Bauernfeind (Green Flight Jacket) for a Christmas photo shoot with the Tanker. To the left of the red propeller danger stripe, the other five original plank holder call signs are listed. From top to bottom: “Fergie”, “Spock”, “Coon”, “Chick” and “Abbs”.



Personal photo

1987 Squadron Christmas Card



Personal Photo

A KC-130R photographed on an early morning low-level training flight over the Western Arizona Desert in 1988

VGMR-352 typically conducted annual training detachments to MCAS Yuma in order to practice assault field landings, low-level navigation, fixed and rotary wing refueling, formation, aerial delivery and other Tactical Manual (TACMAN) skills. The core competencies learned and practiced would serve the squadron well during this period of integration with Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) or MEU (SOC) operations. Fortuitously for the future, Yuma provided the harsh desert environment and austere outlying fields that closely mimicked the Middle East and East Africa. Mike “Fergie” Ferguson, the squadron’s Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) and Tanker Lincoln plank owner would plan and oversee the entire evolution. The squadron car was driven across by Junior Officers or “drained and plugged” and flown into the desert base.

In early 1988, the car was driven to Yuma, AZ accompanying a squadron training deployment. During the training detachment, Paul Krug took the car for a squadron beverage logistics run across the frontier to Algodones, Mexico. On his return, the Border Patrol detained him and threatened to seize the car, believing that the Tanker is an official US Government vehicle that had illegally crossed into Baja California. Fortunately, one of the officers at the border crossing was a former Marine. With a wide grin, he lets the Keeper of the Car escape and evade back to MCAS Yuma on a technicality with the vital refreshments safely in tow.



<http://blog.seattlepi.com/ramblinman/2009/12/23/a-day-trip-by-car-into-los-aldones-baja-california-mexico>
Algodones Border Crossing, Mexican side, heading north



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Algodones
The more colorful view from El Norte, looking south

At the conclusion of the detachment, the car was left behind in Yuma because of overheating problems. Naturally, it was parked in the O’ Club’s space clearly marked for the Base Commander of MCAS Yuma. After a few weeks, the CO of VMGR-352 was threatened with sanctions if the car wasn’t moved. Moreover, the MCAS

Yuma base commander demanded a ransom for the car's return. In a bold overnight raid, Paul Krug was flown to MCAS Yuma, where he stealthily exited a scheduled logistics flight while carrying several gallon jugs of water and radiator fluid in his overloaded ALICE pack and hands. Recovering the impounded vehicle, he honked the horn at the puzzled guards as he breached the front gate outbound. The car's first Keeper then sped away across the state line in the cool of the night. Stopping for several radiator refills, the successful tactical recovery mission returned the Tanker Lincoln back to its rightful home at VMGR-352.



<https://fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ac/kc-130-jato.jpg>



<https://fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ac/c-130-jato.jpg>

Aircraft 020 is shown demonstrating airshow JATO takeoffs at different times. In the late 1980s, VMGR-352 transitioned to the low visibility blue gray/light-gray paint scheme reminiscent of 1940s era Flying Leathernecks in the South Pacific.

For several air shows in the mid-eighties, the Blue Angels' Fat Albert KC-130 did not make it out to El Toro and Leo Falcam, an original Tanker owner, wowed audiences with his airshow JATO (Jet Assisted Takeoff) performance. VMGR-352 gained high visibility within Marine Aviation, and with the public, at the annual MCAS El Toro Airshow. The Tanker Lincoln was showcased, surrounded by long lines of spectators waiting for photographs with the iconic vehicle and inside tours of the nearby KC-130 that was parked on static display.



Personal photo



Personal photo

Inaugurated at the beginning of the Korean War in 1950 as a one-day event commemorating Armed Forces Day and hosting 15,000 visitors, the annual MCAS El Toro Airshow expanded to a three-day event attracting more than 1 million people. The Tanker Lincoln was always a hit and served as a backdrop to numerous photographs. The static display KC-130 and squadron car were parked at the end of the Third Marine Air Wing line across from historic Second World War aircraft.

In the late summer of 1988, China has completed its military seizure of the Spratly Islands, the opening ceremonies of the XXIV Olympiad commenced in Seoul and Paul Krug departs for a one-year tour to Okinawa-based VMGR-152. At this juncture, all the early members of the Big Eighties Tanker Lincoln crew have now left the Raiders. Now, a "Next Generation" largely comprised of squadron maintenance officers will take charge of the iconic squadron car.

1988 – 1997: Boldly going to ev’ry clime and place



Personal photo

Battle Herk parked on the ramp on Kwajalein Island. The squadron was still flying occasional trans-Pacific navigation trainers/ logistics runs back and forth from California to Japan. The Pacific islands of Oahu, Midway, Wake and Kwajalein served as familiar staging bases for VMGR-352 between MCAS El Toro and Japan recalling the earlier heydays of KC-130 TRANSPAC refueling of Navy and Marine squadron movements in the 70s and early 80's.



Personal photo

“In the snows of far-off Northern lands” (Alaska)



<https://68.media.tumblr.com/a200ae92f2eb997975073f42a3293eeb/tumblr>

... “and in sunny tropic scenes” (Egypt)

By the late eighties, VMGR-352 epitomized the second verse of the Marine Corps Hymn and could be found “always on the job” in “ev’ry clime and place”. It was servicing nearly all the Unified Command Plan’s (UCP) worldwide responsibilities. The squadron, along with Okinawa deployed VMGR-152, was operationally assigned to the vast PACOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) from the U.S. West Coast to India. From its home in El Toro, California, it carried out mostly domestic Title 10 “man, train and equip” and logistics missions, along with North Carolina-based VMGR-252, in North America. The continent later became the territory of Northern Command (NORTHCOM). In the mid-eighties, the squadron provided pilots and training to VR-22, a Navy C-130 squadron stationed in Rota, Spain (under the aegis of European Command or EUCOM) as it acquired an aerial refueling capability. In addition, the Raiders supported counter narcotics operations in Central and South America with aerial logistics missions for Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). The squadron flew Antarctic sorties for Operation DEEP FREEZE for the first time in 1989. However, one role would prove to be the most consequential for VMGR-352. In August 1987, the Raiders sent airplanes to Egypt supporting Operation BRIGHT STAR. Almost a decade earlier, the squadron had been assigned to MAG-70, the Air Combat Element (ACE) of the 7th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (7th MEB). 7th MEB, with equipment and supplies already pre-positioned aboard amphibious logistics shipping in the Indian Ocean, would be the “first to fight” unit of combat consequence slated for the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF). The RDJTF would expand and eventually become Central Command (CENTCOM). It’s designated Marine Component for contingencies remains the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF). CENTCOM commitments would have the Raider Jolly Roger “unfurled to every breeze”. The flag would flutter in the dusty Shamals of the Arabian Peninsula, ripple in the warm trade winds crossing the Horn of Africa and, eventually, flap in the harsh sandstorms of Central Asia.



<http://www.hdwall4k.com/star-trek-ultra-hd-4k-desktop-wallpapers/>

1989: The “Next Generation” squadron car begins with an overhaul and a new look.



Personal photo

George H.W. Bush is now president, the other Michael Jackson reigned as the “King of Pop”, and the second TV installment of Star Trek has the USS Enterprise, crewed by “Next Generation” ships complement under the command of a balding English skipper, once again saving the galaxy. LtCol “Fast Eddie” Bauernfeind, with a close-cropped full head of Marine regulation hair, served as the CO from 1988 to 1990 and the “Next Generation” of Tanker Lincoln operators has taken over the mantle of the car.



Personal photo

Squadron Car, still referred to as the Tanker Lincoln, undergoing restoration in the late Eighties inside the squadron hangar



Personal photo

Then-Capt James King working on the car. Aircraft 018, a KC-130R is still sporting a post-Vietnam gloss-white/ gray paint scheme while undergoing maintenance in the background.

The car was titled, registered, and insured with James King. He, along with Rusty Bell, Mark “Squeaky” Heaton, Randy Wormmeester, Roy Devor, Mark “Combat” Curtis, Robert Akin, and a few other Maintenance Marines using their own funds and time to repair and “spruce up” the car. The Tanker Lincoln received a new livery with white lettering along with a skull and cross bones. The original names as well as the American flag were removed from the trunk. Renovation work started in late 1988 and was finished by early 1989.



Personal photo

Jimmy King and his wife pictured in front of a newly painted Tanker Lincoln. King was the guiding force behind the restoration of the squadron car at this juncture.

All prep work on the car was completed at the VMGR-352 hangar at El Toro. “One Day Paint” shop in San Juan Capistrano CA repainted the car black and put on a new silver vinyl top. The Sign Shop on base made all the lettering for “Cleared to Plug” and the “skull and crossbones”. The national insignia on each rear quarter panel was made smaller. The electric window motors and tracks were rebuilt, and the group of Maintenance Officers also mounted four new radial tires around gold insert chrome wheels. When finished, the car, was much more evocative of the “Deathmobile” from the movie “Animal House” rather than the “Cop Car” from “Blues Brothers”.



VMFP Facebook page

The VMFP-3 “Lieutenant Mobile”, which operated for a time at MCAS El Toro until the disestablishment of the RF-4 photo-reconnaissance squadron in 1990, was an example of another squadron automobile.

Over the years, a rivalry developed as various fixed and rotary-wing squadrons at both MCAS El Toro and MCAS Tustin fielded cars of their own. None ever matched the Tanker Lincoln in appearance, fame or longevity and the other vehicles quietly disappeared over time. In later years, some squadrons acquired second or even third replacement squadron cars as none were kept in continual use like the Tanker.



Personal photo

A refurbished and immaculate Raider Tanker Lincoln showing off the “Next Generation” livery.

In addition to local operations in and about El Toro, the Lincoln is taken to several Jimmy Buffett concerts. On occasion, cross-country Battle Herk crews from other VMGR Squadrons and the Blue Angels’ Fat Albert crew, often squadron alumni, continued to use the Lincoln upon request. In an unfortunate sidebar, visiting “Otis” crews, temporarily escaping the mirth and liveliness of MCAS Cherry Point, were banned from further use as they left the car filthy on several occasions.

Official VMGR-352 Command Chronologies submitted during this time stress the squadron provided “support for a wide range of activities for all military services” while emphasizing tactical training and continued integration into MEU (SOC) workups. Before the introduction of the MV-22 Osprey tilt rotor aircraft, Marine long-range overland troop insertion and raids were conducted by KC-130s or a combination of Herks and helicopters. MAGTF planners, recalling the 1976 Israeli operation at Entebbe, exercised a series of airfield seizures and raids involving two or three squadron airplanes carrying Camp Pendleton based Marines. At the same time, the Raiders leveraged the Air Force’s Advanced Airlift Tactics Training Center (AATTC) Course, at Saint Joseph, MO, along with continued support of Marine Aviation’s Weapons Training Instructor (WTI) Course at MCAS Yuma, to advance the squadron’s tactical expertise.

1989 - 1990: Calm before the Storm

Around this time, LtCol Bob Price has been serving as the Raider CO since February 1989, the Communist Chinese (ChiComs) are removing the bodies of dead democracy protestors sprawled in Tiananmen Square, the Soviets withdrawal from Afghanistan is in progress, and an obscure dictator named Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990. A peacetime unit is using its beloved car for all the usual squadron events and activities, driven by squadron officers. Things are about to change as President George H.W. Bush orders preparations for a massive military operation on the Arabian Peninsula in response to aggression from the Iraqi dictator.



Screenshot from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDzCvCyv7KU>

A section of KC-130s overflies the USS Guam (LPH-9) during Operation EASTERN EXIT. Amid the DESERT SHIELD build-up on 4 January 1991, VMGR-352 shifted a portion of its focus and provided helicopter air refueling (HAR) support to two CH-53E Sea Stallion heavy lift helicopters. The CH-53s were operating off the amphibious assault ship, which was transiting the Indian Ocean. The ship rapidly repositioned to launch a long-range non-combatant evacuation (NEO) of the US Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia. Three Battle Herks were forward deployed from Thumrait, Oman supporting both the ingress and egress of the successful mission.

LtCol Price left the squadron early for a Test Pilot School assignment and LtCol Arlen Rens took the squadron to war as CO. Four days after the Iraqi invasion, Raider KC-130s were on the move to the Gulf supporting several Wing logistics and air-refueling requirements. Because of limited ramp space available for coalition aircraft, the Battle Herks will beddown at Bahrain International Airport. A portion of the squadron stayed behind at El Toro to support other tasks.

In a noteworthy incident prior to the commencement of hostilities against Iraq, four Marine F/A-18s coming off combat air patrol (CAP) over the Northern Arabian Gulf were stranded airborne by dense fog in late November 1990. LtCol Rens authorized the launch of a tanker in zero visibility from a closed field that refueled the Hornets in extremis.



National Archives (<https://catalog.archives.gov>)

Aircraft 015 photographed operating out of a temporary landing zone during Operation DESERT STORM

1990 - 1991 Desert Shield & Storm



Personal photo

MAG-11 squadron aircraft flyby photographed over Kuwaiti oil fires. El Toro based MAG-11 was the nucleus for MAG-70 in a Middle East contingency and would be among the "first to fight". MAG-70 headquarters served as the 3rd Marine Air Wing (Forward) before being absorbed into the Wing itself as the force build-up continued.

The years of post-TRANSPAC tactical training will now be used in combat. The Squadron forward deployed seven aircraft in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm from August 1990 through March 1991. Subordinate detachments from other squadrons will augment. VMGR-352's primary mission was tactical air refueling of fixed wing aircraft. Other major tasks assigned included aerial delivery, air transportation, battlefield illumination and boring holes in the sky while flying the all-important, but monotonous, Airborne Direct Air Support Center or DASC (A) missions. Combat sorties were logged from 16 January through the ceasefire on 27 February 1990. VMGR-352 performed spectacularly during the short war.

In what was to become the pattern of things to come, the car was left in the Raider Hangar parking lot at MCAS El Toro until the squadron returned. After the Iraqi capitulation, most of the Raiders flew home along with the rest of the Third MAF but would return to the theater within a year's time for another commitment.



Personal photo

The Tanker Lincoln parked outside the VMGR-352 hangar at MCAS El Toro



National Archives (<https://catalog.archives.gov>)

Raider KC-130 photographed on the ground in Baidoa, Somalia filling fuel bladders for Third MAW rotary assets early in 1993. During the first phase of the UN sanctioned intervention to alleviate mass famine and suffering, security of humanitarian aid shipments, rather than nation building, was the mission. The “Black Hawk Down” incident occurred a few months later in October 1993. The vicious 18-hour urban battle, fought by Somali militias secretly supported by Al-Qaeda fighters against American special operations forces, triggered a domestic public backlash and a US withdrawal. This event highlighted the naiveté of the newly installed Clinton Administration foreign policy team. In their defense, almost the entire bipartisan national security and foreign policy community were caught up in the euphoria of the time best epitomized by Francis Fukuyama 1992 book “The End of History and the Last Man”. Many opined that with the fall of the Soviet Union, liberal democracy and capitalism had triumphed. Armed conflict between nations would be rare. China lagged several decades behind in economic development, technology, and military capability. World trade would take center stage. The primary function of the US Military was to enforce order in regions of the globe not integrated with the interconnected or “globalized” world. For VMGR-352, this would precipitate several African safaris.

1991- 1994: The Storm subsides, “In and Out of Africa”, and the Navy shows up?

As returning Gulf War veterans parade through the streets of Washington D.C., the Tanker Lincoln was used in its last major public event held off base on May 31, 1991. It was driven north up the 405 freeway to a charity Raider (LA Raiders) vs. Raider (VMGR-352) basketball game held at Redondo Beach Union High School. The game was played in order to raise money for Mepet Bonney-Clay, a single mother in need of a lung transplant. The LA Raiders had committed to the event and there was a desire to include returning Marines from the Gulf War. Bonney-Clay’s brother contacted MCAS El Toro, and the call was referred to the Wing Sergeant Major. He immediately thought of the VMGR-352 Raiders. With the squadron just returning from the Persian Gulf, no intramural basketball team had formed or practiced, and a scratch team of Raider volunteers went north to play. In the spirited game, the Marine Raiders lost by 13 points to the Raider professional football players. As of 2021, Mepet Bonney-Clay was alive and living in Arizona.

In December 1992, President George H.W. Bush, in the last full month of his presidency, orders a US military intervention, centered on I MEF, to Somalia in support of UN humanitarian relief operations as Operation RESTORE HOPE. VMGR-352 contributed an eight-plane detachment initially based out of Aden, Yemen and Kenya. In Aden, two bombs, targeting VMGR-352 Marines, exploded at and near the hotels where Raider personnel were billeted on December 28, 1992. It was not known at the time, but the perpetrators would later be identified as Al-Qaeda. They missed their mark but did kill a hotel employee and four Austrian tourists. All III MAW Marines departed Aden and the squadron consolidated in Mombasa, Kenya in order to support Somali relief efforts. The terrorist organization would go on to bomb the World Trade Center in 1993 and successfully attack the USS Cole in Aden Harbor in 2000, as precursors to the atrocities of September 11th. Almost two decades after the Aden bombing, the Raiders would personally return the favor and play a central role in facilitating the demise of Al-Qaeda’s safe haven in Afghanistan.

Again, the Tanker Lincoln remained at the squadron in care of Marines who were not forward deployed. Those left behind use it on base and for occasional trips down the I-5 Freeway to the NAS Miramar O’ Club on Wednesday night. Later in 1994, the squadron will send a four-plane contribution to Africa for Operation CONTINUE HOPE in March, and provide support for another NEO, during Operation DISTANCE RUNNER in April, this time evacuating Americans and others escaping a civil war in Rwanda.



National Archives (<https://catalog.archives.gov>)

Aircraft 240, with the Marine Battle Colors streaming out the forward escape hatch, is shown operating a Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP) at Belt Huen, Somalia in January 1993 during Operation RESTORE HOPE. The FARP enabled AH-1W Cobra attack helicopters flights that provided overhead protection for UN food convoys against the various warring factions and criminal elements.



Personal photo

VMGR-352 Marines, some wearing the "chocolate chip" pattern camouflage utility uniform, photographed in 1993 outside Mombasa, Kenya while deployed in support of RESTORE HOPE.

LtCol Jay Pellicone, who served as squadron CO from March 1992 through December 1993, granted the one and only inter-service Operational Control (OPCON) chop of the Lincoln to a non-Marine unit in October 1993. A portion of the squadron had just retrograded back to MCAS El Toro from East Africa. He allowed the VR-57 "Conquistadors", a Navy Reserve C-9B squadron home-based eighty miles south at NAS North Island, use of the car for two weeks. The Tanker featured prominently in then-LCDR Paul Krug's wedding party and subsequent fiesta throughout south Orange County. After a washing and waxing, it is again returned to the squadron.



Personal photo

Picture above taken of the Krug Wedding Party with the Tanker Lincoln at the Mission San Juan Capistrano in October 1993. Over the years, squadron alumni would return on cross-countries or otherwise and borrow the car. Typically, the Squadron Flight Duty Officer maintained the keys at the duty desk. Mike Ferguson (far left) was one of the car's buyers in 1984 and Paul Krug (second from right) was the Lincoln's first "Keeper of the Car"



Personal photo

A view of the old Raider Hangar at the former MCAS El Toro as it appeared in September 2015. The Tanker Lincoln was parked on the left side of the photo where a chain link fence once stood separating the squadron from Marine Wing Support Squadron 372. The hangar and its surrounding tarmac are used as a storage area for construction of the Orange County Great Park. Piles of debris and compost material occupy former aircraft parking spots.



Personal Photo

Taken in front of a static display RF-4B located near MCAS El Toro Gate #9 (Marine Way entrance near the O' Club), a group of navigators pose with the Lincoln in the early '90's. Occasionally, the Nav Shop drove and washed the car.

1994 – 1996: Restricted to MCAS El Toro

In 1994, the first group of women Marine student naval aviators are working to earn their wings, LtCol John Brady served as CO of VMGR-352, and a four-plane squadron detachment flew in support of operations in Eastern Africa. Buddy Smith, a squadron pilot, assumed the mantle as Keeper of the Car. In addition to all the normal upkeep, he rebuilt the driveshaft and rear end. The car was used to drive around MCAS El Toro with lunch trips to the 19th Hole Golf Course Snack Bar and was given front row parking at the O' Club during the El Toro Air Shows. Chuck Pitts, an enlisted Marine, hot-wired the car from the static display at an El Toro Airshow and drove Marines back to the barracks where they proceeded to incorporate the vehicle into the evening's festivities.

Sadly for the Southern California branch of the "Raider Nation", the Raiders Football franchise transfers back north to Oakland in 1995 over a long-standing stadium construction dispute near LAX. All links, forged early on first by Mark Mykityshyn and subsequently by Paul Krug and others, are now completely severed between the squadron and the team. They will not be renewed until April 2015 for the initial research of this narrative. Today there is little corporate memory at the Oakland (Las Vegas since 2020) Raider's Business Office of VMGR-352, use of the Raider name, logo, slogans, or cheerleader support or the car.



National Archives (<https://catalog.archives.gov>)

Aircraft 017 flies over the Rift Valley of Kenya, during Joint Task Force Kenya, Operation NOBLE RESPONSE in March 1998. The squadron supported UN relief efforts with the delivery of humanitarian daily rations (HDRs).

In June of 1996, as Monica Lewinsky unhappily toiled away in her new Pentagon assignment with an unlaundered blue dress hanging in her closet, the first C-130J was undergoing its second month of flight test, and Colt "Scope" Hubbell was assigned as the Keeper of the Car. The Lincoln had been kept in good condition as a result of Buddy Smith's work. As time passed and the mileage kept increasing, the brakes and steering needed repair just to ensure that it was safe to drive. Colt Hubbell took it upon himself to replace the brakes and rotors, which subsequently much improved the road handling of the car. The silver vinyl top that had previously been installed with the Next Generation livery was getting a little ragged. About this time, 1st Lt Rich "BTO" Bachmann decided to take the vehicle through a local car wash. The Tanker went into the car wash in one piece and came out in two. The large rotary car wash brushes tore the silver vinyl top completely off the metal. Upon realizing what had happened, Rich Bachmann confronted the service station about the damage done and was told that the establishment was not responsible. Fearing the repercussions of returning the iconic vehicle in tatters and being an innovative officer of Marines, he improvised and devised a plan to make the establishment pay restitution. He threatened to appear daily, in Dress Blues, with the car, carrying a large sign saying: "DON'T USE THIS CAR WASH!" Fortuitously, the manager did not call his bluff and agreed to pay a couple of hundred dollars to appease the pugnacious Raider. The squadron junior officers shopped around and commissioned a nearby El Toro shop to install a replacement black vinyl top.

The car was still a highlight at the El Toro Airshow, sustaining morale and representing the squadron. It was around this time that the aging squadron vehicle needed constant attention to remain drivable.



Personal photo

El Toro decal was still affixed on the windshield in July 2015.



Personal photo

The condition of the 1996 installed black vinyl top in July 2015.

1997-2001: A New Name and Home Down South



Personal photo

Flight crew performing an early morning preflight of a GV-1 Hercules on the squadron ramp at El Toro in the early 1960s. The Lockheed GV-1, later redesignated as the KC-130, with its air-refueling capability, was first introduced to the Marine Corps through a newly designated VMGR-352 at the Orange County Marine base on March 15, 1961.

During the Second World War, Marine Utility Squadron 352 (VMJ-352) was initially established at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina on April 1, 1943, before relocating to MCAS El Centro, CA for training with the Curtiss R5C-1 (USAAF C-46) Commando transport aircraft. Redesignated as Marine Transport Squadron 352 (VMR-352) on June 10, 1944, the squadron would transfer to MCAS Ewa (Barbers Point), Hawaii in February 1945 and support Fleet Marine Forces throughout the Pacific Theater. Postwar, VMR-352 transitioned to the four-engine Douglas R5D Skymaster (naval variant of the DC-4) which was flown by the squadron in both the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War. The squadron flew the R5D and the R4Q Flying Boxcar until the debut of the Herk. In 1949, VMR-352 would again move and spend the next 50 years home-based at MCAS El Toro, CA. The Raiders would be the last squadron to depart south and join the rest of the Third Marine Air Wing at the former Naval Air Station Miramar in April 1999.

1997-1999: Goodbye to the OC



<https://shop.gavinarts.com>

In 1997, “Titanic” was the biggest blockbuster to date, Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston were more than friends, Bob Bader was CO with Leo Falcum, one of the original squadron vehicle plank owners, serving as his XO. The car is now referred to as the “Raider Mobile”. No one is quite sure when the name change occurred. At this time, VMGR-352 deployed several detachments in support of successive MEU (SOC) deployments for Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in Kuwait and Operation INFINITE MOONLIGHT in Jordan.

The 47th and final MCAS El Toro Air Show ended with record-setting crowds of more than 2 million spectators over the last weekend of April 1997. Marine Aviation, spearheaded by the Blue Angels flight demonstration team, made a final salute to Orange County. The annual tradition thrilled millions of spectators for nearly five decades. On the left, the final 1997 Airshow poster, by the local OC (Orange County) artist Paul Gavin, featured a KC-130 in the lower left corner.

During that same month as the last El Toro airshow, the car would not start and Dave Mulder, an enlisted Powerline Marine, trailered the car to his home in Wildomar, CA. There, he replaced and repaired numerous parts. By May 1997, through Dave’s efforts, the Raider Mobile is drivable, but is only used on base at El Toro due to reliability issues. In the summer of 1997, just before his departure to VMGR-152, “Scope” Hubbell turned over the Lincoln to 1st Lt Peter “Oscar” Meyer. In mid-July 1997, “Oscar” Meyer registered the car in his name.



<http://wingwife.blogspot.com/2009/10/aviator-brief-viii-officers-club.html>

A view of the main entrance of the El Toro O' Club is shown as it appeared in the early 1990's. The squadron car was often parked in a cul-de-sac circular driveway just visible to the right. For some unknown reason, the Tanker Lincoln's usual parking space was labeled "CG 3RD MAW"

The 1990's was the high-water mark for the officer's clubs. Most aviators, not flying or standing duty, showed up at the club on Friday night at every Marine or Navy air station. They partook in "happy hour" festivities to socialize and let off steam. Moreover, the club was an important venue where Junior Officers (JOs) could freely share ideas, roll dice, and listen to the experiences of senior officers. The 1986 film "Top Gun" celebrated and exaggerated this El Toro O' Club atmosphere also present at the NAS Miramar O' Club. A similar esprit de corps existed at the El Toro Staff NCO and Enlisted Clubs. Former Secretary of the Navy John Lehman best summed how the investigations and aftermath to the 1991 Las Vegas Tailhook Convention affected Navy and Marine Aviation culture in a September 2011 Naval Institute Proceedings excerpt below.

"Now all that is gone. Most officers' and non-commissioned officers' clubs were closed, and happy hours banned. A few clubs remain, but most have been turned into family centers for all ranks and are, of course, empty. No officers dare to be seen with a drink in their hand. The JOs do their socializing as far away from the base as possible, and all because the inquisitors blamed the abuses of Tailhook '91 on alcohol abuse. It is fair to say that naval aviation was slow to adapt to the changes in society against alcohol abuse and that corrections were overdue, especially against tolerance of driving while under the influence".

Bucking this trend in the spring of 1998, Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 11 hosted an officer's social at MCAS Miramar. The squadron and the Raider Mobile were still happily ensconced at El Toro, while the rest of the MAG had already migrated south to Miramar. Then-LtCol Leo Falcam, now sporting the callsign "Bumper", invited fellow officers to join him in a road trip to attend the event at Miramar. Naturally, many wanted to go as it promised to be an adventure. Duane "D-Train" Foster, Alex "Smiley" Miller, Peter "Oscar" Meyer and John "Gump" Peck all piled in the Raider Mobile for a 160-mile round-trip journey down the I-5 Freeway to the former Naval Air Station. Due to the Lincoln's current condition, there was an element of doubt as to the possibility of completing the mission, but with a leap of faith in the venerable machine they departed. "Smiley", "Oscar" and "Gump" sat in the back seat while "D-Train" drove and Leo rode shotgun. In the end, they were able to successfully make the roundtrip with no major issues.



<https://www.ocregister.com/2012/03/05/voters-killed-el-toro-airport-10-years-ago-today/>

On April 15, 1999, VMGR-352 launched its remaining ten Battle Herks not deployed, for the final time from MCAS El Toro to their new home about an hour drive south in San Diego County. The Orange County Register photographed the squadron taxiing out for departure. The KC-130s departed in five two-plane sections. That same day, the Raider Mobile was moved from MCAS El Toro to MCAS Miramar. Because of the vehicle's mechanical condition, it is trailered along the 5 and 805 Freeways. It has an El Toro decal, but there is no insurance or current registration.

This was the time of the so-called “unipolar” moment. The United States had no strategic peers or competition. The once mighty Soviet Union was now the much-diminished Russian Federation. Both the governing Clinton Administration and Candidate George Bush advocated a policy of engagement with a Red China that would rise and become a responsible stakeholder in the American-led Liberal Democratic Order. With the demise of the Cold War, the presumed “Peace Dividend” made possible a massive reduction in the size and budget of the U.S. Defense Department. As an agent of this new strategic reality, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission determined that both MCAS Tustin and El Toro would close and convert to residential and commercial use. The MCAS El Toro era was over for Marine Aviation, VMGR-352, and its iconic but aging car.



<http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/Man-Makes-Threat-at-MCAS-Miramar-168673166.html>

Sign near the main gate at MCAS Miramar

April 1999 - September 2001: Restricted to MCAS Miramar

In January 2000, 1st Lt Joseph Guimond registered the Raider Mobile in his name. The next year in April 2001, Captain Ann Huot of VMGR-352 became the first female Marine KC-130 Aircraft Commander and Dave Mulder served as the Keeper of the Car. The vehicle was restricted to on base use only by both Officer and Enlisted members of the Raiders. Once again, despite the promise of peace and stability, world events would affect both the squadron and the car.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tribute_in_Light_-_11_September_2010_-_1.jpg

New York skyline with Twin Towers "Tribute in Light"

2001 - 2015: A Casualty of War

September 2001-2007: The Long War commences for the Raiders

At the very outset, the Marine KC-130 community was directly affected by the events of Sept 11, 2001. The Boeing 767-200 First Officer on United Airlines Flight 175, that was hijacked and flown into the South Tower of the World Trade Center, was Michael Horrocks. Maj. Michael "Rocks" Horrocks, USMC had left active duty to pursue an airline career with United Air Lines, after serving in various Marine KC-130 Squadrons.



National Archives (<https://catalog.archives.gov>)

A late-night view of Raider Battle Herks parked at a Forward Operating Base (presumably Jacobabad, Pakistan) during the early stages of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Almost all the initial missions were flown at night.

On September 23rd, just twelve days after the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks, VMGR-352 deployed four aircraft, initially to Shaikh Isa Air Base, Bahrain and later to Jacobabad, Pakistan in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). Two KC-130s from VMGR-252 augmented the detachment, all operating under the Raider call sign. Then-Brigadier General James Mattis personally liaised with the Pakistani military and established access to three Pakistani bases (Pasni, Shamsi, and Jacobabad) in order to project power into Afghanistan from the sea. Jacobabad served as both the beddown sight for the Marine Battle Herks as well as the staging base for Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) assets. General Mattis was given command of all amphibious forces in theater and aggregated them together into Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58. Task Force 58 (TF-58) was comprised of the Peleliu and Bataan ARGs, positioned in the North Arabian Sea with the embarked Marines of the 15th and 26th MEUs. These afloat assets were reinforced by Navy Seabees, Joint Special Operations Forces (SOF) assets and land-based Raider KC-130s. TF-58's overall intent was to establish a second front in southern Afghanistan that would disrupt terrorist lines of communication and generate "chaos" behind the center of Taliban power. In northern Afghanistan, as depicted in the book "The Horse Soldiers" and the ensuing film "12 Strong",

Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters, were already reeling from battles with American SOF and Northern Alliance fighters, coupled with punishing US airstrikes. The retreating Taliban and foreign fighters consolidated in the city of Kandahar and southern portions of the country bordering Pakistan.

What followed next was the decisive phase of the campaign to eliminate the Taliban and Al-Qaeda sanctuary in Afghanistan. Six Raider KC-130s, along with six ARG/MEU Marine CH-53Es, operating at night due to Pakistani political concerns and flying over steep mountainous terrain, conducted helicopter air-refueling, rapid ground refueling (RGR) and tactical troop insertions into a 6,400-foot dirt airfield. These sorties made possible the deepest projection of amphibious power in Marine Corps history. On November 25th, 2001, TF-58 Marines established Forward Operating Base (FOB) “Rhino” on a dry lakebed about 80 nautical miles from Kandahar. From the remote foothold, Marines and SOF troops proceeded to execute a variety of offensive military operations 350 nautical miles from the sea. Marine KC-130 sorties, in large part, enabled both the rapid build-up of force at FOB Rhino as well as the later sustainment of the MAGTF which expanded its operations to over 400 nm from its Arabian Sea launching point. Fuel, ammo and water were among the essential provisions that had to be brought in nightly. Raider KC-130 crews accomplished this mission using the naked eye and what light could be brought to bear by the Air Force’s Special Tactics Squadron element that was present. TF58’s mission ashore climaxed with the capture of the Kandahar Airfield in mid-December 2001. The early days of OEF featured the distinguished Raiders at their historical “finest hour”. However, tragedy would soon follow.



Photo by Keith Whitehouse

On the evening of January 9, 2002, aircraft 021 crashed into steep mountainous terrain while on a night circling approach near Shamsi, Pakistan, killing all seven VMGR-352 Marines on board. Shamsi served as a major FARP location supporting rotary wing operations in Southern Afghanistan. Capt. Matthew Bancroft, Capt. Daniel McCollum, GySgt. Stephen Bryson, SSgt. Scott Germosen, Sgt. Nathan Hays, LCpl. Bryan Bertrand, and Sgt. Jeannette Winters became the first Marine casualties in the Global War on Terror. At left, the mountaintop crash site memorial that was erected in Pakistan is shown.

Marine KC-130s, operating from Bahrain and Jacobabad, flew the majority of TF-58’s intratheater logistics needs. This achievement was notable as the KC-130 airframes varied from 25-42 years old, the “F” and “R” model cockpits were not night vision compatible, and any maintenance performed was often completed in a dusty forward combat area. The 15th and 26th MEU Marines re-embarked their ships in February 2002 and TF-58 was disbanded. However, the Battle Herks remained in support of MARCENT (Marine component of CENTCOM) and subsequent KC-130 detachments will rotate in and out.

The early Afghan intervention transitioned into a long-term counterinsurgency and multi-national nation building operation. The Marine Corps would eventually become engaged in two major wars along with continued operations worldwide. More important and pressing priorities face the squadron rather than the upkeep of the Raider Mobile. The car becomes an indirect casualty of 9/11 and the resulting Long War. Kept at the squadron parking lot, the vehicle sat mostly untouched until May 2002.

In 2002, Dave Mulder returned from a deployment and ensured the car was started and kept in good working order. The Raider Mobile needed minor service, a battery charge, and a good cleaning. Personnel rotations in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM became so regular that the car was only started and driven whenever unit Marines returned from deployment.



National Archives (<https://catalog.archives.gov>)

Aircraft 240 again photographed, this time on the ground in Kandahar, boarding Marines of the 26th MEU. Later, KC-130s from VMGR-352, along with reserve squadrons VMGR-234 and VMGR-452, would be combined as Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron Deployed Forces Bahrain.

The United States in January 2003 engaged in another conflict with Saddam Hussein. Once again, the Raiders deployed to the Persian Gulf combining with reserve squadrons VMGR-234 and VMGR-452 to form Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron Deployed Forces Bahrain in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), also known as the Hercules Air Group (HAG). The Raiders contributed nine planes to the reinforced squadron, which fielded a total of twenty-four aircraft. Most missions flown were fixed-wing air refueling. Other tasks included air logistics and the monotonous, but important, Airborne DASC. Reserve squadron integration with VMGR-352 into a “Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Group” was first proposed during Desert Storm, but never implemented due to the quick Iraqi collapse.

In February 2004, another Lincoln Continental cruised the streets of Hollywood in the hit HBO series “Entourage”, a bombastic New York businessman named Donald Trump had been the host of “The Apprentice” for one month, and VMGR-352 supplied a yearlong detachment of four aircraft in support of OIF II. Back home, Dave Mulder continued to maintain and service the car until his transfer to VMGR-152 in April 2004. At that time, Squadron officers took the lion’s share of custody, and the Raider Mobile was used mainly for officer functions on MCAS Miramar. There was minimal usage and no insurance or valid registration. The Raiders had only a few personnel remaining back home at MCAS Miramar.



Personal photo

The Lincoln is shown parked adjacent to the fuselage tank locker, across the street from the squadron, at MCAS Miramar

With the Squadron operationally committed worldwide in 2005, the vehicle was stored outside in the squadron parking lot behind the fuselage tank locker. At this point, the Raider Mobile was barely operable. In March 2005, during the retrograde from Operation IRAQI FREEDOM II, VMGR-352 began its conversion to the more capable KC-130J. The KC-130F, first flown in the early 1960s, was over four decades old. Legacy F and R model aircraft required increased maintenance man-hours and could not perform safely in a night tactical environment requiring NVGs. Between the busy transition and the constant state of deployments, the car sat idle.



www.navair.navy.mil/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.PhotoGalleryDetail&key=A7F7C123-10E0-4283-9032-A54CEBF1258ES

In 2005, VMGR-352 began its transition to the KC-130J. The “J” model features an all-glass cockpit, night vision compatible lighting, digital flight-management system, advanced defensive systems, more powerful engines coupled to a six bladed prop and reduced crew requirements. By late 2006, VMGR-352 will exclusively fly the KC-130J.

The “J” model KC-130 allowed the squadron to better perform its core missions of expeditionary airfield operations, assault transport, aerial refueling of both fixed and rotary wing aircraft, ground refueling and air delivery. Moreover, it also enabled three “core plus” missions of battlefield illumination, close air support and ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance). The latter two “core plus” tasks were not executed by earlier Marine KC-130 variants. The advent of a “glass cockpit”, along with improved and simpler aircraft systems brought a change to the Battle Herk crew complement. Since its introduction in 1961, a standard legacy Marine KC-130 crew for air-to-air refueling missions consisted of an Aircraft Commander, Co-Pilot, Flight Engineer, First Mechanic, Navigator and Loadmaster. Flight Engineers and Flight Mechanics, with their years of training and experience, accomplished incredible feats of maintenance while deployed and were the unsung heroes that kept the Battle Herks flying in austere conditions. The KC-130J basic crew would shrink to four: Aircraft Commander, Co-Pilot, Crew Chief and Loadmaster. Later consolidation would combine the crew chief and loadmaster skills into a “Crew Master” Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).



Marine Aerial Navigator Wings

The Marine Corps Navigator position was eliminated with the introduction of the “J” model that incorporated airliner technology coupled with GPS and improved pilot navigational displays and interfaces. VMGR-452, a reserve New York Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron, was the final unit to transition to the KC-130J in May 2021. Legacy KC-130s and navigators are now things of the past within the USMC Squadrons. When complete, the Marine Corps envisions a total purchase of 86 KC-130Js by the mid-2020s.

February 2006 marked the first combat utilization by VMGR-352 of a J model aircraft to support OIF, and the Raiders commenced a continuous detachment operating from Al Assad Air Base, Iraq. Another milestone for the KC-130 community occurred later in September 2006 with the deactivation of VMGRT-253. As the Marine KC-130 training squadron and model manager, VMGRT-253 was tasked with the initial training of all KC-130 crews. Fleet squadrons concentrated on tactical training and employment. With the retirement of VMGRT-253, the two CONUS (Continental U.S.) based fleet squadrons assumed the responsibility of training replacements. In addition, the Raiders qualified VMGR-152 crews in the KC-130J. Command chronologies of this period emphasize that “squadron efforts were primarily focused on two distinct areas”: both the “deployment of aircraft” (to include personnel and equipment) to Operation Iraqi Freedom and “Fleet Marine Force training and operations”.



Personal photo

Car parked near the fuselage tank locker at MCAS Miramar showing the effects of continued deterioration. The 1969 Lincoln Continental was eight years younger than the KC-130Fs that had just been replaced.

In mid 2006, Saddam Hussein met his maker with the help of a rope, and the squadron Maintenance Material Control Officer (MMCO), Joe Lilley, started to raise and use his own money to promote a partial restoration of the squadron car. David Sidwell, Johnathan Kauzlarich, the Powerline Division, and a few of the squadron's enlisted Marines took responsibility for replacing the radiator core, carburetor, heads, and rebuilding the rear brakes. The motor was then removed, cleaned up, and reinstalled. Joe Lilley purchased insurance and a new registration on the car. The car was drivable but in need of constant repair. The car was then moved to a Raider Mobile assigned spot next to the VMGR-352 CO's squadron parking spot. It was used principally to run small groups to the Miramar O' Club for lunch. A renewed interest in the squadron car was sparked. The Raider Mobile still needed lots of work as the years of neglect had taken a toll on the overall condition of the vehicle.



Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (dvidshub.net)

An all-too-common sight during the Global War on Terror: VMGR-352 departing on deployment

2007: Hope is not a Strategy

In February 2007, Jay Leno came to the squadron for a hangar party. He briefly spoke to Joe Lilly about the car's history and the difficulties facing this model Lincoln. His handlers got him on stage quickly and he wished the squadron luck on fixing the car. Unfortunately, the late-night comedian did not get the opportunity to see the Raider Mobile in person. Mr. Leno was uniquely interested in rare and exotic cars, and any hopes of interest or referrals for restoration from that opportunity quickly faded away.



Personal photo

Jay Leno at VMGR-352 Hanger Party



Personal photo

Jay Leno with Marines from VMGR-352

Pictured from left to right are Brandon Sorrells, Joe Lilly, Jesse Bocanegra, Shawn Walters, and Jacob Cobb

2007 – 2009: Barely Avoiding the Bone Yard



<http://www.bkdunn.com/blog/2008/03/>

KC-130s at the Davis-Monthan AFB 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (309 AMARG) "Boneyard"

In 2007, Apple's first iPhone is several months old and Senator Hillary Clinton is forced to concede the Democratic Party Primary nomination to a fresh political newcomer characterized by another party stalwart as "articulate and bright and clean". More importantly, David Girardot held the Lincoln's registration and became the Keeper of the Car. Dave was one of the squadron's pilots. At the Raider Golf Tournament that year, the car was showcased at the 18th Hole as a static display. The car was intermittently running, barely drivable and now stored near the squadron fuselage tank locker.

The Raider Mobile was again submitted to the "Overhaulin'" TV show in 2008, but as that was thought to be the final season of the show, along with minimal personnel available to promote interest, there was no response. In April 2009, the Raiders were once again called upon to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, relocating two aircraft from Iraq to Kandahar, Afghanistan. One aircraft remained to support OIF until August 2009. By year's end, VMGR-352 crews were approaching eight continuous years of flying combat support operations in the Global War on Terror. In 2009, many of the squadron's older legacy aircraft are already placed in mothballs at the Davis-Monthan Air Force aircraft boneyard, outside Tucson Arizona.

2010 - 2015: From Bad to Worse for the Raider Mobile and the Long War goes on

In 2010, VMGR-352 was the first squadron to employ Harvest HAWK, the Marine Corps armed variant of the KC-130J, in combat. A Raider Herk provided on-call close air support (CAS) for the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines (3/5) fighting in Sangin, Afghanistan. Five Taliban fighters were confirmed killed in the engagement. With the addition of a fire-control console, a target sight system with infrared, electro-optic sensors, and a TV camera, the KC-130J can deliver precision fire support to Marines on the ground with both Hellfire and Griffin missiles.



Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (dvidshub.net)



Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (dvidshub.net)

The KC-130J bolt-on/bolt-off Harvest Hawk weapons system first operational engagement was conducted by VMGR-352 over Afghanistan in October 2010. Coupled with the persistent loiter capability of the KC-130J in a permissive air threat environment, Marine Battle Herks are the close air support “platform of choice” in the Global War on Terror. Pictured to the left is a rack of Hellfire missiles slug under the left wing of a Raider KC-130J. To the right, the AN/AAQ-30 Targeting Sight System is shown mounted on the left hand refueling pod

About the same time Harvest Hawk was introduced, VMGR-352’s Airframes Division worked on the car in hopes of restoring it to operable condition, as it was not running or drivable. The car was stored on the side of the fuse tank locker. The driver's side window motor had failed. A temporary repair was done, but rain and the elements damaged the interior. In addition, rodents infested the vehicle, and some wiring and interior elements were destroyed. In April 2013, the “Raider Mobile” was submitted to the new season of “Overhaulin’” for the last time. Again, the car was not chosen. Some of the pictures were from the submission are shown below.



Personal photo

View of disintegrating vinyl top and corroding roof



Personal photo

“Skull and Cross Bones”, “Cleared to Plug” and bumper sticker “We support a drug free America” (red color has faded to white) still displayed on the car.



Personal photo

With a compromised roof, the car now experienced internal damage

By 2015, Jon Snow lay dead at the hands of the Knight's Watch and the Raider Mobile similarly lay immobile across the street from the VMGR-352 hangar at MCAS Miramar. Even with a new battery, the engine could only turn over and run intermittently. Chris Harrell, an enlisted Powerline Marine and others, with small monetary donations, did some repair work and installed tires. Restoration and repair estimates exceeded an imaginable budget ranging from \$45,000 – \$60,000. Restoration required design plans, roof and structural repair or replacement, engine, transmission, and drivetrain overhaul, interior to include carpet, front and rear seat upholstery, and headliner. Title, license and registration was also part of the fundraising plan. Efforts began by GySgt Jake Cobb to restore or replace the car formerly known as the Tanker Lincoln.



Official USMC photo on DVIDS website

View from the ground in July 2015, as VMGR-352 conducts aerial delivery training in support of Task Force 51/5 in the CENTCOM AOR.

First made famous by General James Mattis as TF-58, TF-51/5 serves as the NAVCENT (Naval component of CENTCOM) expeditionary force, combining all naval amphibious assets and the scalable 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade. VMGR-352 detachments were assigned to the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force—Crisis Response—Central Command as part of its unit deployment program as the long war on terror continued.



Personal photo

Paul Krug (left) and Jake Cobb (right) meet for the first time at the venerable car in June 2015. GySgt Cobb located the former Marine Raider and retired Navy Captain in researching the history of the Lincoln. Jake Cobb would retire from active duty shortly afterwards in August. Paul Krug stopped by MCAS Miramar as he was in nearby La Jolla for his son's soccer tournament. Krug had not seen the car since 1993 and thought it was long gone.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:149808_Lockheed_L.100_Hercules_%28_KC.130

BOO (aircraft 800) and BOB (aircraft 808) are shown to the left and below, in 2016, as having been placed out to pasture at Davis-Monthan AFB. The venerable KC-130F first entered the Marine Corps inventory in 1961 as the GV-1. Later vintage R models were mothballed as well. The 1969 Lincoln Continental Squadron Car also faced the specter of the "boneyard".



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/airlines470/11686220503/>

2016-2020: Restoration Odyssey



Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope is a 1977 space-opera produced and directed by George Lucas and Lucasfilm and distributed by 20th Century Fox.

By the end of 2015, the car was nearly a half-century old, the KC-130J had been operating in the Marine Corps inventory for a decade, the umpteenth installments of Star Wars and Jurassic Park were the top grossing films and Jake Cobb took over as the Keeper of the Car.

2016 - 2018: A “New Hope” for the car



Personal photo

Retiring in August 2015 as a GySgt and a Crewmaster, Jake Cobb was now a former Marine, looking at job prospects and the sole person interested in preserving the Raider squadron car. He had heard tales of its former glory, flew with several Raiders who had participated in some of its antics, and genuinely, wanted to reestablish the Raider Mobile. He approached current leadership, former and current Raiders and advocated restoring the old Tanker Lincoln. Upon the completion of a requested legal review in late December 2015, the official start of “Operation RESTORE TANKER LINCOLN” commenced on February 1, 2016. The engine, drive train, transmission, undercarriage, body panels, roof, and interior were evaluated by professionals to create a restoration plan. In June of 2016, “The Raider Mobile” Foundation was recognized in the state of California as an official tax-exempt entity and Jake began fundraising.

Progress proceeded slowly as funds trickled in. In the months following Jake reached out to a fellow Marine and Raider, Christopher Jones who at the time had a part time web design company called Mandrake Designs. Between the collaboration of the two, the Raider Mobile website along with its “GoFundMe” link served as the principal fundraising tool. The history of the car, progress and concept were included as tabs. The principal course of action (COA) was to restore the existing car. Failing that, alternatives included buying a replacement car or turning the existing vehicle into a static display at an appropriate venue. In February of 2016, a junked Lincoln Continental was purchased for parts. In November 2016, Donald Trump was elected president by promising to “Make America Great Again”. Jake Cobb only hoped to make the Tanker Lincoln or Raider Mobile presentable and drivable again.



Personal photo

Unable to start, much less drive, the car was towed to a garage near MCAS Miramar awaiting funds for restoration. This was the Raider Mobile's first trip out the gates of MCAS Miramar in over a decade.

2018 – 2020: “Back to the Future” for the Marine Corps, the Squadron, and the Car

The 2018 National Defense Strategy altered military strategic effort from countering violent extremism originating in the Middle East and Central Asia to Great Power Competition. Russia, Iran, North Korea and the Peoples Republic of China were the powers noted. In particular, the ChiComs had emerged as the pacing threat despite the years of US engagement.



Official USMC photo on Marines.mil

Raider KC-130Js conduct formation flying over the Salton Sea in conjunction with the 75th Anniversary.

In April 2018 VMGR-352 celebrated its 75th anniversary with all the appropriate fanfare and flyovers. Jake Cobb, Joe Lilly, and Paul Krug briefed Raider leadership on Operation RESTORE TANKER LINCOLN progress and pitched the idea of a renewed squadron car. A month earlier, a MCAS El Toro VMGR-352 reunion was held in late March near the old Orange County base with many in attendance, and this opportunity was also used by the soon to be official, Raider Mobile Foundation, as a fundraiser for the Lincolns slow but forwarding progress.



75th Anniversary Patch



Personal photo of several legacy Raider Flight Engineers

The Commandant's Planning Guidance, released in 2019, redirected the Marine Corps back to its traditional role in naval operations. Distributed operations, long-range precision fires, and sea control tasks were emphasized. Marines may need to operate in contested Western Pacific maritime theater where US naval primacy is no longer assured. The Commandant designated III MEF as the USMC's main effort. On the West Coast, I MEF would serve as an additional deterrent in the Indo-Pacific region. This shift in focus will substantially affect I MEF and its component Third Marine Air Wing. It is not expected that renewed Navy-Marine Corps integration will lead to KC-130Js operating off carriers like the KC-130F launching off the USS Forrestal in October 1963, as shown below. However, the US Marines were back in the business of island hopping and sinking ships reminiscent of Pacific Theater amphibious campaigns.



Official US Navy photo

KC-130F launching off the USS Forrestal in October 1963

Although working in Kuwait, Jake Cobb organized fundraising events in San Diego, Dallas, and other cities. A RaiderMobile Foundation Auction held at the AleSmith Brewing Company (pictured to right) in San Diego was one of several events held at this supporting venue during this time.



Personal photo



Personal photo

A Raider Mobile Foundation fundraiser held at Hop Fusion Ale Works in Dallas Fort Worth. Hop Fusion Ale Works is a (Marine) Veteran owned establishment and supporting venue allowing multiple fundraisers to take place during this timeframe.

By mid 2019, the Raider Mobile Foundation achieved 501(c)3 status with the Internal Revenue Service and was finally established as an official non-profit organization. 2020 dawned, not just with the global spread of the Wuhan Coronavirus, but with the realization that an alternative squadron car COA was required. Fundraising efforts outside of online donations were seemingly impossible during the next few years due to this, and the goal of raising the \$60,000 would still be needed to restore the existing car that had spent the past four years in a state of simple preservation. The idea of turning it into a static display was scrapped. Fundraising, despite Jake's herculean efforts, had reached near \$30,000. It was decided by members of the foundation, supported by multiple discussions with Marines both past and present, and a few key donators, that another Lincoln Continental would be purchased. Using parts from the original and two other donor cars, a new Raider Mobile would be fielded with an initial operating capability (IOC) slated for early 2021. A replacement car was purchased by the Raider Mobile Foundation in Maryland and temporarily registered and insured in the state of New Jersey to begin its own transformation and restoration.

In 2020, Marine Corps Force Design 2030 recommended that active duty VMGR Squadron strength be increased to four squadrons with the new KC-130 squadron standing up in Hawaii. This VMGR buildup is to support Marines potentially deployed across the "First Island Chain" located off the Asian mainland. With its ability to operate on austere short airfields, the Marine KC-130 is a critical enabler of logistics and mobility for geographically dispersed Marine units. "Back to the future" would bring change to VMGR-352 on another front. Surprisingly, this would come not as a silver 1982 DeLorean with gull-winged doors but as a restored black 1969 Lincoln Continental with suicide doors.



Photo from USNI.Org

The decade of the 2020's commenced with VMGR-352 flying training, logistics and aerial refueling (AR) missions. Concurrently, the Raiders still provided aircraft detachments to CENTCOM. Regrettably in September 2020, the squadron would make headlines. Aircraft 765, operating as Raider 50, was conducting an AR sortie in the Kane West Military Operating Area (MOA) just west of the Salton Sea in support of WTI Course 1-21. A VMFA-121 F-35B collided with the tanker resulting in a safe ejection for the Lightning II pilot and an emergency landing in a plowed farmers field, near Thermal, California, for the Herk. The KC-130 had lost two engines and experienced controllability issues after the midair. The news media reported that only "mild injuries" of the KC-130 crew were sustained. Over the years, VMGR-352 lost two other aircraft in accidents: Aircraft 685, a KC-130F which caught on fire after a bounced landing at MCAS El Toro in July 1970, and Aircraft 021, an R model which experienced a controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) mishap in January 2002 in Pakistan.



Personal photo

The new Raider Mobile was on the road by October 2020. All black with whitewall tires, it is shown in the preceding photo parked at the Marine Corps Museum with Jake Cobb. From Quantico, it drove up I-95 to New Jersey to break in its rebuilt 460 cubic inch V-8 engine which is paired with a Ford C6 three speed transmission. This was the first leg of the final phase of transformation. While up in New Jersey the Lincoln would be worked on by a few shops prior to being shipped to Texas. There the Lincoln would undergo phase two preparations prior to a cross-country road and delivery trip to MCAS Miramar.

2021 and beyond: The Once and Future Squadron and Car

“Enter the Dragon” as Great Power Competition returns with a Vengeance



Official USMC photo on DVIDS website

HIMARS loading onto a Raider KC-130 at Camp Pendleton



Concept image from Raytheon Missile & Defense Corp.

Portable Naval Strike Missile concept being demonstrated

Marine Littoral Regiment, Naval Strike Missile, HI-RAIN, and the First Island Chain have entered the Marine Corps vernacular. As always, the versatile Marine KC-130 is poised to support missions both new and old. The Battle Herk allows disbursed Marine units, fielding long-range precision fires, to operate, shift positions, and overcome the tyranny of distance. In a potential Western Pacific conflict, the Herk could rapidly lift personnel, air defense and rocket artillery across the broad battlespace.



Official USMC photo from DVIDS

Aerial refueling was the original *raison d'être* of the Marine KC-130 in the 1960s. With potential adversaries now deploying long-range surface to air missiles, coupled with modern fighters capable of employing extreme-range air to air missiles, traditional AR in a contested environment is risky. The Navy has just introduced MQ-25 low observable unmanned tankers to extend the striking power of the carrier air wing and position the flattop further from harm's way. The Marines are emphasizing stealthy and smaller aerial platforms, both manned and unmanned.

US Special Operations Command has expressed an interest in an amphibian version of the C-130. One version has attachable floats. A float conversion kit could be a future option for the Marine KC-130 community supporting expeditionary advance base operations (EABO) in the archipelagic geography of the Western Pacific.



Amphibian MC-130J as depicted on thedrive.com.

By February 2021 mechanical work on the Lincoln was complete by the master mechanics at Earhart Automotive. Additionally, a new livery was created for the car by Vigg Designs. Both businesses are in Freehold, New Jersey. The Lincoln was prepped for shipping and with much thanks to a former Raider, and Keeper of the Car, Jimmy King who sponsored half the cost of the shipping, the Lincoln made its way to the great state of Texas. Once received the next stop for the restored Tanker Lincoln / Raider Mobile was Ultimate Innovations in Kemah, Texas for an audio upgrade. In March 2021, the car underwent a full paint correction, ceramic coating, and application of the new livery by Apex Motor Trends in League City, Texas. Just prior to the final leg of the trip out west, the Lincoln received a final safety check and road worthiness inspection from Space Center Automotive in Houston Texas.



Personal photos



In mid-March of 2021, silver decals were applied to the overall gloss black paint scheme by Apex Motor Trends. New key tags were made by Flight Equipment Shop Marines at VMGR-352 preceding delivery to the command.



Car photographed at the infamous “Triple T” (TTT) truck stop near Tucson Arizona along the trip west.
The Lincoln was driven approximately 500 miles of the 1500 mile journey



Personal photos

Car photographed on its delivery trailer on Sand Canyon Avenue just outside the former MCAS El Toro



Personal photos

Photo shoot on the former MCAS El Toro on March 20, 2021. The delivery crew was given permission by the current lessor, Tierra Grande Industries, to take pictures of the Raider Mobile in front of the original Raider Country hangar. The hangar and surrounding aircraft spaces are currently a storage facility for compost.



Personal photo credit to Alan Stinar of the Marine Battle Herk Project

The “road trip” west took place over 5 days. The overall route was from League City Texas to San Diego California. It included stops in Dallas Fort Worth, Midland/Odessa, El Paso, Tucson, Phoenix, and Yuma. On that journey was Jake Cobb representing the Raider Mobile Foundation, Alan Stinar of the Marine Battleherk Project and the KC-130 community historian, Payton Scarbrough who was an active duty Marine currently serving with VMGR-352 and was selected to join us by the command, and Johnny Buchanan a civilian friend and amateur photographer. On the leg from League City to Dallas Fort Worth the last registered owner (2007) of the Lincoln, David Girardot, now retired and flying for Delta, also joined the crew of four heading west. Initial delivery to the squadron occurred on March 22, 2021. The restored car was presented to the squadron during an all-hands ceremony held at the Raider Country Hangar at MCAS Miramar. Titled and registered once again in the state of California, the Raider Mobile is “street legal” for the first time in two decades.



Personal photo



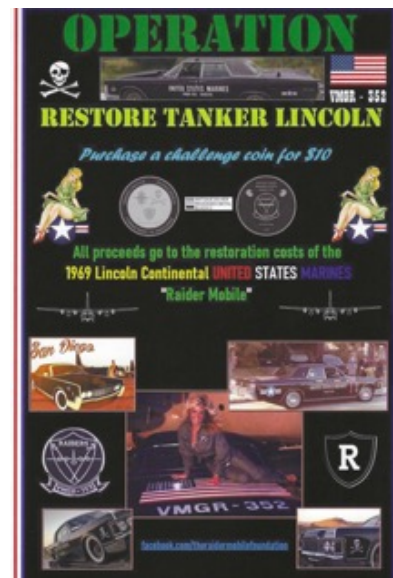
Personal photo

The car with all doors open on display for the squadron. Jake and numerous Raiders determined the capacity of the trunk, recalling numerous past stories about the number of squadron Marines that could fit in the Lincolns “Cargo Bay”.

After delivery of the Lincoln to the Marines of VMGR-352, there was still some unfinished work. The vehicle was loaded back up and headed east to Phoenix Arizona. For safety and useability, the suspension required an upgrade. Jason Bishop, a former Raider Flight Engineer, became the Keeper of the Car during the COVID induced delay for necessary parts. During the Phoenix sojourn, Jason proudly showed off the Lincoln at a few local car shows and did some fundraising. During one of these shows, the Lincoln was awarded “Best of Show” at a veteran themed event.



Personal photo



Personal photo

After a few months delay, being well cared for by Jason, the Lincoln was delivered to the talented mechanics at the “Slab Shack” custom automotive shop of Chandler, Arizona. They designed and installed a much-needed suspension upgrade to the Lincoln. Upon completion, both Jason Bishop and Jake Cobb delivered the Raider Mobile back to the awaiting Marines at VMGR-352. After an absence of over eight years, the car was returned to a parking spot, this time marked “CO’s Guest” across the street from the squadron on July 9th, 2021.



Personal photo



Personal photo credit to Alan Stinar of the Marine Battle Herk Project

This story continues with armed multi-role KC-130J Battle Herks more capable of supporting fellow Marines. March 2018 marked the 75th anniversary of VMGR-352. Three months later in June, a major upgrade, Harvest Hawk+, was successfully tested at the China Lake Naval Weapons Center with improved sensors, weapons, and electronic jamming capabilities. In the Eighties, those that drove the Tanker Lincoln advocated converting several KC-130F models into gunships. Resistance was met from others within the KC-130 community, as well as from the Group and Wing staff, as it was argued that close air support would detract from the primary mission of aerial refueling. However, it was the Air Force AC-130 lobby that kept Marine KC-130s in a narrower, albeit versatile lane. Eventually, everyone from the “Big Eighties”, which coincided with the kickoff of the Battle Herk tactical transformation, moved on. Raiders from “Next Generation” and the “Long War” also came and went. Many left active-duty service and began other careers. Some served at the operational or strategic level. Numerous Raiders, wherever they went, achieved great things. Only a few are mentioned in this story. The car persevered, although in deteriorating shape, as the years went by. Today’s Raiders, belonging to a more cohesive and invigorated KC-130 Community, have expanded their ability to support Leathernecks both in the air and on the ground. The return to Great Power Competition further highlights the Marine KC-130 as a key enabler of Marine Air Ground Task Force power projection and sustainability.

The link between the past and the present, embodied in the preceding pages, tell the story of a black 1969 Lincoln Continental with suicide doors, along with an entourage of Battle Herk Marines, through almost four decades of hard work and play, war and peace, triumph and tragedy. Through the support of many individuals time and donations, the return of the Tanker Lincoln or Raider Mobile was made possible in 2021. The Lincoln was once again with the squadron car representing every VMGR-352 Marine, past, present, and future.

This is the 2020s not the 1980s. Marine Aviation culture has changed. There is little probability that the Raider Mobile will be making the 200+ mile round trip to pick up the Laker Girls for a squadron event any time soon, let alone the even longer trip to reunite with the now Las Vegas Raiders. Female Marines are not confined to non-combatant roles. “Don’t ask, don’t tell” is history. The clubs are not as much in use today as they once were. The Marine Corps is recovering from two decades of waging the Long War on terror.

The Raider patch epitomized the post-TRANSPAC era KC-130 tactical transformation and VMGR-352’s commitment to excellence. Having the Raider Mobile parked in front of the club won’t solve the current national malaise, or cure COVID. However, with leadership and common sense, an iconic squadron car might once again showcase Raider professionalism, camaraderie and pride. Moreover, it just might be fun. Who knows, the car’s traditional O’ Club parking spot may still be mismarked as CG 3RD MAW.

Tanker Lincoln, Raider Mobile, Old Breed, New Breed, it doesn't matter; the title is United States Marine.

Semper Fidelis