FLIGHT JACKET

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The American Harrier pioneer

Courtesy photo

Naval aviator and test pilot, Lt. Gen. Thomas H. Miller, made history by becoming the first Marine to fly the AV-8A Harrier as well as setting the 500 kilometer Closed Course World Speed Record at 1,216.78 mph in an F-4H-1 Phantom on Sept. 4, 1960.

Sgt. Justin M. Martinez
Combat Correspondent

With its capability of vertical takeoff and landing, the AV-8A Harrier could have been viewed as an aircraft enigma when it debuted in the early 1970s. This first generation jet made some individuals slightly skeptical and nervous, but for Lt. Gen. Thomas H. Miller it was a welcomed challenge.

Miller was a naval aviator, test pilot and the first American to fly the Marine Corps' jet. He also made his mark in aviation history by setting the 500 kilometer Closed Course World Speed Record at 1,216.78 mph in an F-4H-1 Phantom aircraft at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., on September 5, 1960.

Years before he made aviation history, the Texas born native enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve in June 1942 shortly after the outbreak of World War II. He was designated as an aviation cadet and underwent flight training at Naval Air Station Dallas and NAS Corpus Christi, Texas.

When Miller was nearing completion of flight school, he heard a conversation from several WWII Marine combat aviators and was impressed enough by these men and their accounts of combat that he, along with classmate John Glenn opted for the Marine Corps. Their reasoning was the Marine Corps offered a better chance to fly fighter jets than did the Navy. Miller was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant and designated a naval aviator on March 1, 1943.

Miller served in numerous job billets during his career, including commanding officer of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 513 and executive officer of Marine Aircraft Group 11 when it was located in Japan. In 1969, Miller was ordered to the Republic of Vietnam, where he served as the director of operations of III Marine Amphibious Force until 1971.

In April 1975, he assumed the duties as commanding general, Fleet Marine Force Pacific and in August 1975, he reported to Headquarters Marine Corps and was assigned the Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation. He was promoted to lieutenant general on Jan. 1, 1976, and retired from active duty on July 1, 1979.

Tom Miller passed away peacefully at his home in Arlington, Va., on Nov. 27, 2007, after a battle with cancer. His wife of 64 years, Ida Mai, was at his bedside.

Miller's personal decorations and awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" and one gold star, the Distinguished Flying Cross with three gold stars, the Air Medal with two silver stars and four bronze stars, the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V" and the Presidential Unit Citation with one bronze star.

Religious Services

The Chaplain's Office, located in Building 5632 on Bauer Road, coordinates regularly scheduled services. For the location and meeting schedules of religious activities, call (858)-577-1333, or visit www.miramar.usmc.mil.

Sunday:
9 a.m. Protestant
Worship Service

9:30 a.m. Protestant
Children's Worship

11 a.m.
Roman Catholic Mass

Religious Education/Sunday:
9:30 – 10:45 a.m.
Catholic CCD Children K-12

10 a.m. Protestant
Adult Bible Study

Weekday Worship Service:
Mon. – Fri. 11:30 a.m.
Catholic Mass

Mon. 6:30 p.m. Contemporary
Praise and Worship Service

Wed. 7 p.m. Baptist Service

Study Groups:
Mon. 7 p.m.
Night Bible Study,
Classroom in the Chapel area

Tues. 6 a.m.
Morning Prayer Service
and Study Group

Islamic Worship Service:
Fri. at noon.
Located in the Chapel or visit
www.icsd.org

Jewish:
Jewish Outreach at
(858) - 571 - 3444
www.jewishinsandiego.org