

# WEAPONS AND TACTICS INSTRUCTORS COURSE: FIRE IN THE SKY



Story and Photos by Greg L. Davis

**W**eapons and Tactics Instructors Course (WTI) 02-06 came to a dramatic close in late April 2006 at MCAS Yuma, Ariz., with live-fire training missions flown day and night by most of the combat aircraft types within the USMC fleet. One of the largest weapons training events in the Marine Corps aviation community, WTI teaches the latest tactics and weapons employment techniques to aviators and aviation support staff who then take this knowledge back to their assigned units to teach to others.



A low flying HMLA-167 Super Cobra speeds through the Chocolate Mountains of Southern California while pressing an attack during Weapons and Tactics Instruction on 19 April. This massive exercise brings the Marine Corps aviation community together to work on the latest in combat tactics.



**Above, a CH-53E Super Stallion kicks up dust during a desert landing. Below, an HMM-364 Sea Knight lands to pick up Marines as a full moon rises above the mountains in the distance. Facing page, Forward Air Controller Capt. Shannon Brown with MAWTS-1 guides an F/A-18 Hornet toward its target during WTI 02-06 on 19 April.**

The semiannual course is organized and run by the Marine Aircraft Weapons and Tactics Squadron (MAWTS) 1—a squadron staffed by experienced aviators as well as aircraft and tactics specialists—along with personnel from sister services who lend their expertise to common military functions such as forward air control. Established in 1978, WTI provides a focused, graduate-level training exercise for officers from all aviation communities, with officers from ground combat, combat support, and combat service

support communities also in attendance to ensure appropriate air-ground interface.

During WTI 02-06, Marine Corps and Navy aircraft from across the fleet and around the world participated. All current USMC combat airframe types participated, along with sister services, NATO, and contracted aggressor aircraft and equipment. USMC aircraft types included the AV-8B+ Harrier; EA-6B Prowler; F/A-18A+, C, D, and RF/A-18D (ATARS equipped) Hornets; KC-130T and KC-130J Hercules; CH-53E Super

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Stallion; CH-46E Sea Knight; AH-1W Super Cobra; and UH-1N Huey. Two newly upgraded E-2C Hawkeyes and a NATO E-3C Sentry provided airborne warning and control system coverage. Aggressor support was expertly provided by the Marines of the VMFT-401 Snipers flying the F-5E/F Tiger II along with the Army's Threat Support Maintenance Activity flying an AN-2 biplane and an Mi-24D Hind, and positioning a SA-8 mobile surface-to-air missile system in the desert ranges of the nearby Chocolate Mountains.

A civilian-owned MiG-21 Fishbed in Polish markings was also seen flying missions to support WTI. The aircraft presents a realistic threat picture in performance and radar signature. Also in attendance was a modified O-2 Skymaster configured with long-range surveillance equipment similar to that of modern drone aircraft. The aircraft has had the front engine replaced by an elongated nose containing the sensor suite and the front left seat replaced with the controls for the equipment.



**A diverse range of aircraft used during WTI includes an Mi-24D Hind helicopter, top, operated by the U.S. Army's Threat Systems Management office and a modified Cessna 337H, above. A VMA-211 Harrier pilot, below, keeps his hands visible while maintainers work on his aircraft during WTI exercises at MCAS Yuma, Ariz., on 19 April.**





**Above, tracer rounds and 2.75-inch rockets from a Super Cobra light up the night sky in the Chocolate Mountains of Southern California on 19 April. Right, an HMLA-773 Huey flies above the desert floor as it approaches its target during live-fire exercises on 19 April.**



Although aircraft from just a handful of USMC units participated in WTI, pilots and aircrew members from almost all USMC flying and support units shared these deployed assets. An often overlooked aspect of WTI training is how sister-service personnel are not only consulted on their tactics, but are also sent to WTI to train in their specialty using Marine Corps tactics. Forward Air Control is the best example of this trading of ideas and joint learning. Multiple Air Force combat controllers participated in WTI 02-06 to obtain certification to control Marine Corps aircraft on the battlefield. To obtain this certification the USAF (enlisted) controllers

went through the USMC Forward Air Controllers Officers' Course. WTI 02-06 wrapped up without any major accidents or injuries, graduating 123 officers and 66 enlisted personnel. Approximately 74 aircraft flew more than 2,600 hours in about one month, and expended 242 tons of ordnance. ✈

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