

FLIGHT JACKET

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Marines, Cal Fire work together



An air crewman with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 removes a fire bucket from a CH-46E before attaching it to the helicopter during an exercise with Cal Fire at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, May 14. The training enhanced the organizations' ability to work together to prepare for the upcoming fire season.

LANCE CPL Christopher O'QUIN
Combat Correspondent
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Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif. - Medium and heavy helicopter squadrons belonging to 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing worked together with Cal Fire for a fire bucket training exercise here. May 12- 16

Throughout the course of the exercise. CH-53E and CH-46E pilots took turns flying over the Case Springs and Lake Pulgas landscapes as buckets dropped water onto the parched earth.

Even though the squadrons practiced dropping water last week. 3rd MAW has been preparing for wildfires for years.

"Last January, Cal Fire visited our squadron and gave a full day of briefs about the fire bucket and how to put out fires with different types of drops/" said 1st Lt. Ryan E. Thompson, a pilot with HMH - 466, Marine Aircraft Group 11 (Reinforced). "This exercise with a culmination of everything we have learned during the past several months."

Throughout the exercise squadrons took turns flying out to Camp Pendleton. The air crew attached fire buckets that could pick up 300 to 600 gallons of water.

After attaching the buckets to the helicopters took off for the training sites.

The helicopters hovered over the lakes, whipping up a torrent of water. In less than a minute, the buckets took up hundreds of gallons.

The aircraft took off with members of the Cal Fire crew on board and flew to the simulated burn sites marked by orange flags and bags.

At the Cal Fire helicopter manager's command, the crew chiefs pressed a button ejecting gallons of water cascading to the ground in a matter of seconds.

Drop after drop, Cal Fire firefighters provided advice and helped the helicopter crew time their drops to maximize effectiveness.

"It gave me a better understanding on how to approach a situation and use your resources to solve the problems we might face when fighting an actual fire," said Cpl. Alex S. Medina, a crew chief with HMM-163. "If something is not working with the fire bucket this training helped me learn how to find out and fix it."

During the training, fire fighters with the San Diego Fire Rescue Department participated, learning how the Marines worked and assisted with the drops.

"It was great to meet the Marines and see how well they performed, and they did," said Daniel King, a helicopter manager with San Diego Fire Rescue Department "If there was any question of how well they performed it was answered, and they are now more than capable of handling wildfires-like last year's."

During October's wildfires, multiple 3rd MAW squadrons flew over Southern California dropping thousands of gallons of water over the blazing wildfires.



"This training was good because it helped the pilots who hadn't flown in last year's wildfires and it reinforced what some of us know," said Capt. John W. Gilmore, a pilot with HMH-465 who flew in the fires last year. "This will be good training for the upcoming fire season."

Picture: lance Cpl. Johnathan C. Venable, an aerial observer with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163, Marine Aircraft Group 11 (Reinforced), 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, watches a fire bucket pick up more than 300 gallons of water during Cal Fire training aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, May 15. To release the hundreds of gallons of water, the aerial G' observers and crew chiefs press a red button attached to a cable.