



Col Gary Elsten, USMC (Ret.)
 "Gary"

Date of Designation: October 16, 1970 NA# V-30875

Dates of Active Duty: August 1966 - July 1995.

Total Flight Hours: 11,740

Carrier/Ship Landings: Fixed wing: 14

Approximate Flight Hours:

Jet: 11,300 Prop: 300 Helo: 140

Combat Tours:

Vietnam 1967-1968, PhuBai, DongHa, KheSanh, QuangTri, DaNang

Vietnam: 1972 DaNang, Nam Phong, Thailand

Total combat missions: 115

Aviation Commands:

CO, VMFA-251, August 1982 - January 1984

CO, MAG-24, June 1988 - August 1990

Combat Awards:

2 Distinguished Flying Crosses & 15 Air Medals (WW II)

Non-Combat Awards:

Defense Superior Service Medal

Legion of Merit

Duty Assignment Chronology

08/66-10/66	Officer Candidate School, Quantico, VA.
11/66-03/67	The Basic School, Quantico, VA.
04/67-06/67	Supply Officer School, Camp Lejeune, NC.
07/67-01/68	3rd Tank Bn, Vietnam.
01/68-08/68	3rd Bn, 26th Marines, Vietnam.
09/68-04/69	C&E Schools Bn, 29 Palms, CA.
05/69-10/70	USN Flight School, Pensacola, Meridian, Kingsville.



12/70-08/71	VMFA-101 Yuma, AZ, Ops. billets.
09/71-04/72	VMFQ-531 El Toro, CA, Maint billets.
05/72-12-72	VMFA-115, Vietnam, Thailand, Admin.
01/73-04/73	H&MS-15 Det, Cubi Point, PI, Maint OIC
05/73-06/76	VT-7, Flight Instructor, Safety Officer, Meridian, MS.
07/76-04/77	MAG-31, S-4 Dept, Beaufort, SC.
05/77-10/77	VMFA-122, AMO, Beaufort, SC.
11/77-06/79	VMFA-451, AMO/OPSO, Beaufort, SC.
07/79-05/80	Student, Air Command & Staff College, Montgomery, AL.
06/80-07-81	VMFA-312, AMO, Beaufort, SC.
08/81-07/82	VMFA-333, XO, Beaufort, SC.
08/82-01/84	VMFA-251, CO, Beaufort, SC.
02/84-06/86	MAG-31, Special Projects, Beaufort, SC.
07/84-07/86	HQMC, F-18 Requirements, Washington, DC.
08/86-05/87	Student, National War College, Washington, DC.
06/87-05-88	1st Marine Brigade, G-1, Kaneohe Bay, HI.
06/88-08/90	MAG-24, CO, Kaneohe Bay HI.
09/90-06/93	Joint Staff, Washington, DC.
07/93-06/95	MCAS, Cherry Point, NC, Base Realignment & Closure Coordinator.

Summary of Significant Career Events

- (1) In 43 years of flying Navy/Marine Corps aircraft, Gary amassed 11,740 accident free flight hours. He entered the Marine Corps through Officers Candidate School under a Ground Officer contract. After a ground combat tour in Vietnam in 1967/68, Gary was accepted for Navy Pilot Training. After winging and following initial F-4 qualification and a short stateside VMFA tour, Gary returned to Vietnam flying 115 combat missions from Da Nang, and Nam Phong, RTAFB, Thailand. He held operational flying billets in VMFA-115, VMFA-122, VMFA-251, VMFA-312, VMFA-333, VMFA-451, VMFA-531, VMFAT-101, VT-7 and MAG-24.

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Summary of Significant Career Events continued

- (2) In 1976, after returning to the fleet from a Training Command tour, Gary was assigned as AMO/OPSO of two separate squadrons over 3 years, then to professional military school in Montgomery, AL. Following school, he went back to the fleet deploying two times to the Far East in 1981/82. A week back from his second deployment, he assumed command of VMFA-251 to prep for a deployment to Denmark to participate in NATO exercises.
- (3) The dreaded Washington staff tour was his next assignment at HQMC in the Aviation Department where he served for two years as the F/A-18 program coordinator. He avoided the typical 3rd year on staff when selected to attend the National War College.
- (4) In 1987, Gary reported to the 1st Marine Brigade in Kaneohe Bay, HI as the Brigade Personnel Officer and in June 1988, he assumed command of MAG-24, the Marine Corps' only Composite Air Group with VMFA, HMM, HMMH, Air Control, and Support squadrons. During this tour the Air Group transitioned the last three active duty VMFA squadrons from the F-4 to F/A-18.
- (5) Gary retired on July 1, 1995 and in early 1996 he was hired as a contract pilot to pilot the T-39 Sabreliner in NFO training at Pensacola. During his 16 years at NAS Pensacola, over 4,000 Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and foreign (German, Italian, Saudi, and Singapore) officers were winged. Gary hung up his flight suit in April 2012 and now does whatever Virginia wants.