



MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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‘COPTERS MOVE FOR PGA, NOT NEIGHBORS

“Is anyone actually surprised that the Marines will change their flight paths temporarily for a national audience of millions of people, but they won’t do it permanently for a community of a few thousand?”

The question was posed last week in an email message during a frothy exchange among members of the Seawolf Good Neighbor Marine Aircraft Alliance, the community group that spends too much of its members’ good time vainly waving their arms at Marine Corps helicopters, hoping to keep them flying on course—specifically over the golf course at Torrey Pines.

The message refers to the week-long noise assault on Del Mar Terrace, Carmel Valley and Torrey Hills during the Buick Invitational Golf Tournament Torrey Pines. It seems that although during most of the year the Marine chopper pilots have a terrifically difficult time sticking to the so-called “Fairway” flight path, which avoids most problems with the neighbors, last week they managed to protect the PGA tournament with pinpoint accuracy and at the same time buzz most major community targets at all hours.

I wonder what might have happened had another nationally televised golf tournament been held at The Meadows in the heart of Del Mar Mesa at the same time—might the helicopters have headed over to I-15 where they were originally routed when they first arrived at Miramar Air Base? These days, 99 percent of Marine Corps F-18’s and helicopters fly the coastal routes instead of I-15.

That’s because the I-15 communities screamed louder, longer and nastier than our “good neighbor” groups here. In fact, we virtually welcomed them here by rationally agreeing that the best regional solution was flying the golf course route out to sea about a mile before heading north. Most of the neighbors could live with the few times that conditions required the ‘copters to cut corners.

But, the early friendly “good neighbor” attitude is giving way to purple faced rage from community leaders in the face of constant corner cutting by pilots and around the clock route changes. And what boils Alliance Chair Wayne Dunlap the most is that the Marine Corps doesn’t appear to have a management plan in place to effect what on the face of it is a problem requiring simple solutions.

So frustrated at the inability to find a way to keep the helicopters flying neighborhood friendly routes, some community leaders are beginning to quietly talk about what was unthinkable several years ago: supporting a 24-hour international airport at Miramar. Or at least funding a study that would compare noise impacts of commercial air flights with helicopters.

The airport thinking revolves around the notion that commercial aircraft are quieter than the military craft because they would be high enough by the time they reached Carmel Valley and Del Mar. The lack of supporting infrastructure and disastrous environmental impacts aside, even if a commercial airport was approved today at Miramar, it wouldn’t be built in many of our lifetimes.

Before providing any more fodder to the commercial airport scheme, the Alliance might consider a new Fair Way approach to fixing the noise problem, since attending endless “leadership” meetings at Miramar Air Base, reporting on website complaint lines (www.miramar.usmc.mil/noise/index.htm) and the monthly visit from the Marine community relations flak to local planning board meetings isn’t solving the problem.

Perhaps buying the Buick Invitational tournament winner, San Diego native Phil Mickelson, a Del Mar Terrace villa, sponsoring monthly nationally televised golf tournaments at The Meadows, and moving those \$20,000 corporate skyboxes that lined the 18th hole last week to the Torrey Pines High School track, might provide more compelling reasons for the Marines to stay their course.

Seemed to work last week at Torrey Pines.