

Men's Group Rare Visit To Truax Field

On August 22d, 2012 approximately 20 members of the Fitchburg Senior Center Men's Group were provided an all afternoon tour of Truax Field, Madison WI. This event was sponsored and conducted by the Wisconsin Air National Guard airmen assigned to the 115th Fighter Wing which is based at Truax. The 115th Fighter Wing, as a Air Guard unit, supports local missions such as support of Madison Municipal Airport, state missions as commanded by the Governor and federal missions. The federal mission is primarily to provide F-16 aircraft in support of our nation's fighter attack capability. Lt. Col. June Dykstra, the Wing's Executive Officer and host for the tour. proudly pointed out to the group that since 9/11 the 115th has had at least one guardsman deployed to real world combat or humanitarian missions at all times. The tour began with the group treated to watching 4 F-16s take off in full afterburner. This was viewed from less than 500 feet from the runway and hearing protection was required. Several support agencies involved with flying and combat missions were viewed next. The first was ground combat heavy and light weapons and field equipment such as body armor and night vision goggles. Next was the base's command center which is in constant command and control communication with Madison's Municipal Airport. Truax and Madison's airport share common a runway for both commercial and fighter aircraft. A visit to the base fire department clearly showed the incredible assortment of firefighting equipment the Air Guard maintains to support both civilian and military operations. Next on the tour was an aircraft maintenance hangar that housed F-16s, jet engines and inert bombs and missiles. Two very senior maintainers explained the incredible

capabilities of the F-16s, the efforts necessary to keep them operational and the munitions payloads for what in effect is a flying weapons platform. The last event was a briefing by Major Tim (coach) Dyer, a 115th F-16 fighter pilot. He played videos of actual war fighting by the Wing's F-16 in southwest asia, primarily Afghanistan. He explained what is it like and what is expected to fly this incredible airplane.....often at 9 times the force of gravity. He talked about how ariel refueling is performed and how often as the jet is a true fuel guzzler. He spoke about some of the equipment a pilot wears while flying to offset the tremendous speeds flown, sometimes at twice the speed of sound. He answered dozens of very intelligent questions with the calm, cool and collect nature of a fighter pilot. The day ended with a group photo next to the base's F-16 static display visible upon entry to the base. To a person the group stated how professional, knowledgeable, polite and how the Wing obviously operates as a team. This tour was uniquely special to a relatively new member of the Men's Group who actually coordinated the entire tour with the Guard. He is retired Air Force Lt. Colonel Dave Thoreson. Dave was born and raised in Sheboygan Wi, joined the Air Force after graduating from the UW in 1978 and spent a thirty year career in fighter aircraft squadrons and wings. The last 22 years with F-16 units. He had not been on an Air Force Base since March of 2010. Dave stated to Lt. Colonel Dykstra at the end of the tour, "it was nice to hear the sound of freedom again." Dave presented a memento to Lt. Colonel Dykstra on behalf of the men's group. In the spirit of true military camaraderie she shook his hand, and saluted Dave smartly, and then gave him a hug. This fine gesture was not lost on the men's group. The Air Force is a true team.....