

# Base Helps Scouts Earn Merit Badges

Stories and photo by Kathleen Bynum

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**B**oy Scout Troop 728, sponsored by St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Richardson, came aboard Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base recently to earn merit badges.

“We are lucky. One of our parents, Cary Venden, is a retired Marine pilot and was able to make arrangements for us with Lt. Col. Tom Mackie,” said Scoutmaster Pete Ineich.

Ineich brought 18 Scouts, ranging in age from 11 to 18. His two sons, Nick, 16, and Will, 14, were among the Scouts.

The Scouts were determined to earn two merit badges while on the installation: the Aviation Merit Badge and the Citizenship in the Nation Merit Badge.

The requirements for receiving the Aviation badge, Ineich said, include a visit to the Control Tower, learning about aviation charts and performing a preflight inspection of an aircraft. The Citizenship in the Nation badge is earned by visiting a federal facility and learning how it benefits the nation.

“The Scouts toured Base Ops, the control tower, got to use flight simulators and night vision goggles, toured the Armory, some F-18 maintenance and saw an F-18 up close,” Ineich said. “It was a fantastic tour!” While he admits the entire tour was pretty cool, Ineich’s youngest son, Will, enjoyed the Armory command the most.

“The Marines let us handle the weapons and showed us how to sight and aim and the F-18 flight simulator,” Nick said. “It was cool doing a roll and shooting rockets.”

One thing Nick learned surprised him, though.

"What surprised me the most was that the weapon that the Marines use today, the M-16, is the same one, almost, that my dad used when he was in the Army in the 1980s."

The Scouts couldn't have had a better visit, Iniech said.

"I can't say enough about the Marines and Sailors we met during our visit," he said. "Without exception, they went out of their way to ensure our Scouts had a good experience! They were patient and friendly and answered each and every question. Our boys had a unique and memorable experience because of their willingness to 'go the extra mile.'