

Air Boss: Navy-Marine TACAIR Integration 'Alive and Well'



An F-35C Lightning II assigned to the "Black Knights" from the Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 314 makes an arrested landing on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72). *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Michael Singley*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy's plan to deploy Marine Corps fighter-attack squadrons (VMFAs) on its aircraft carriers is very much in force as the two services continue to equip some of their tactical jet squadrons with F-35C Lightning II strike fighters.

"TACAIR Integration is alive and well," said Vice Adm. Kenneth R. Whitesell, commander, Naval Air Forces, answering a question during a June 29 webinar of the West 21 symposium of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association and the U.S. Naval Institute.

He noted that VMFA-314, the Marine Corp's first F-35C squadron, is beginning workups this summer with Carrier Air Wing 9 on board USS Abraham Lincoln for a deployment in 2022. It will be the second deployment of the F-35C on a carrier.

The USS Carl Vinson is deploying this summer with the Navy's first fleet F-35C squadron, Strike Fighter Squadron 147 (VFA-147). VFA-97 has been in transition to the F-35C since April to become the fleet's second F-35C squadron.

Whereas Marine Corps VMFA squadrons have deployed on carriers with some frequency for decades, the practice was institutionalized two decades ago with the implementation of the TACAIR Integration plan, which originally planned for four VMFA squadrons embedded in carrier air wings, with some Navy VFA squadrons serving in sequence with a Marine aircraft group

in Japan under the Unit Deployment Plan.

Whitesell said that the TACAIR Integration Plan was modified four or five months ago to provide a total of two VMFA squadrons to embed in the Navy's carrier air wings.

"It's critical for us as we keep that naval warfighting concept alive and well," Whitesell said.

The latest deployment of a VMFA squadron ended Feb. 25 when VMFA-323 returned to its home base after a deployment with Carrier Air Wing 17 on board USS Nimitz. It was the last deployment of the legacy F/A-18C Hornet on an aircraft carrier.