

DOD Orders 1,500 Troops, Additional Assets to Southern Border

Jan. 22, 2025 | By Matthew Olay, DoD News

The Defense Department is sending 1,500 active-duty service members and additional air and intelligence assets to the southern border to augment troops already conducting enforcement operations in that region, Acting Secretary of Defense Robert Salesses announced this afternoon via a statement to the media.

The announcement came roughly 36 hours after President Donald J. Trump issued an executive order directing DOD to address the situation at the border.

“On Monday, to protect the security and safety of United States citizens, President Trump declared that a national emergency exists at the southern border of the United States. The president directed me to take all appropriate action to support the activities of the secretary of homeland security in obtaining complete operational control of the southern border of the United States,” the statement reads.

The Pentagon has since established a task force to oversee the expedited implementation of border-related executive orders; with U.S. Northern Command heading up the effort and being supported by U.S. Transportation Command, the National Guard Bureau, the military services and the Department of Homeland Security.

The 1,500 additional active-duty service members authorized by Salesses will initially be put to work on the placement of physical barriers and other border missions within the next 24 to 48 hours, a senior military official told the media.

The additional active-duty personnel includes 1,000 soldiers, as well as 500 Marines who had previously been on standby in Southern California to potentially help combat the Los Angeles County wildfires that broke out two weeks ago, the senior official said.

With 2,500 active-duty personnel already in the region, the additional 1,500 troops will represent a 60% increase in active-duty forces since Trump was sworn in on Monday, Salesses remarks in his statement.

“We anticipate that overall, on the southwest border, will provide real-time situational awareness of persons, vehicles, vessels and aircraft; and they’ll work with on operator-level maintenance, movement and staging of assets,” the senior military official said.

In addition to the additional active-duty ground personnel, DOD will provide airlift support for flights operated by DHS to implement the deportation of more than 5,000 individuals detained by CBP at the border sectors in San Diego and El Paso, Texas, Salesses’ statement reads.

Transcom is providing two C-130 Hercules and two C-17 Globemaster aircraft to assist in that support, the senior military official said.

Additionally, the official added that there are UH-72 Lakota military helicopters that began flying today in support of CBP.

DOD is also coordinating with the State Department to obtain diplomatic visas and provide host-nation notification for those individuals who are deported, a senior defense official said.

DOD is also providing intelligence analyst support at the border.

“We’re in the process of sourcing those requirements right now,” the senior military official said.

“We also anticipate that there could be some additional airborne intelligence, surveillance and support assets that would move down to the border to increase situational awareness,” the official added.

Regarding DOD’s future activity on the border, the senior defense official said that – while there are no specifics to release at the moment – there will be a number of additional border enforcement missions developing.

“This is going to be a big priority for the department under the acting secretary and the secretary that will be coming on board,” the defense official said.

“In short order, will develop and execute additional missions in cooperation with DHS, federal agencies, and state partners to address the full range of threats outlined by the at our nation’s borders,” Salesses’ statement reads.

“President Trump directed action from on securing our nation’s borders and made clear he expects immediate results. That is exactly what our military is doing under his leadership,” the statement concludes.

**VMFA-251 Reactivated as
Marine Corps’ First East
Coast-Based F-35C Lightning**

II Squadron



U.S. Marines with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 251 march in formation during the reactivation ceremony for VMFA-251 at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, Dec. 5, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Orlanys Diaz Figueroa)

From the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 251, Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 14, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), reactivated during a ceremony on Thursday aboard Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina, following a four-year, seven-month hiatus.

VMFA-251, known as the “Thunderbolts” or “T-Bolts,” was previously deactivated during a ceremony on April 23, 2020, aboard MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina, after returning from deployment in 2020 in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.

The Thunderbolts' deactivation concluded its 34 years as an F/A-18 Hornet squadron. The squadron was then relocated to MCAS Cherry Point to begin its transition to the F-35.

VMFA-251 received its first F-35C Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter delivery on Sept. 17, 2024, marking a key milestone in the squadron's transition process. VMFA-251 is the Marine Corps' first East Coast-based operational F-35C Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter squadron.

The F-35 is a fifth-generation fighter jet with advanced stealth, agility and maneuverability, sensor and information fusion, and provides the pilot with real-time access to battlespace information. It is designed to meet an advanced threat, while improving lethality, survivability, and supportability. The F-35C is designed to operate from conventional aircraft carriers or land bases and provides operational maneuverability and persistence to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). Superior internal fuel capacity results in a significantly increased combat radius and longer on-station times as compared to the F-35B, the F-35's short takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) variant.

"Today, almost 83 years to the day after it was founded, VMFA-251 reactivates as an F-35C Lightning II squadron. The T-Bolts are humbled and honored for the privilege of carrying that proud legacy forward," said Lt. Col. Evan Shockley, commanding officer, VMFA-251. "Our immediate focus is working towards initial operational capability, which means that VMFA-251 has enough operational F-35C Lightning II aircraft, trained pilots, maintainers, and support equipment to self-sustain its mission essential tasks. Following that, we will turn our attention towards reaching full operational capability to ensure that, when called upon, the T-Bolts will stand ready to serve our great nation."

VMFA-251 is a subordinate unit of 2nd MAW, the aviation combat element of II Marine Expeditionary Force.

Northrop Grumman Modernizes LITENING Secure Data Links for US Marine Corps Aircraft



Integrated on the LITENING pod (centerline), the Advanced Tactical Datalink (ATDL) enables fast, secure, two-way transfer of video and data from the F/A-18 strike fighter. (Photo Credit: U.S. Marine Corps)

Updated data link is the first to incorporate the BE-CDL waveform, which enables faster communications

From Northrop Grumman

ROLLING MEADOWS, Ill. – Dec. 5, 2024 –Northrop Grumman Corporation (NYSE: NOC) has been selected by the U.S. Marine

Corps to provide Advanced Tactical Data Links (ATDL) in LITENING electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) targeting pods on F/A-18 aircraft. ATDL's technology allows for faster transfer speeds compared to previous waveforms, enabling more rapid decision making.

The LITENING pod's ATDL is the first tactical aircraft data link to use the Bandwidth Efficient Common Data Link (BE-CDL) waveform, which enables faster communications.

ATDL's secure, two-way, multi-band link allows for the transmission of video, still images and metadata to enhance mission precision.

Operators in the air and on the ground can view the same live video feed simultaneously.

Expert:

James Conroy, vice president, navigation, targeting and survivability, Northrop Grumman: "LITENING's high-definition sensors on the advanced EO/IR targeting pod gather critical information, enabling more rapid decision making. The ATDL enhancement is like upgrading to better Wi-Fi by building on LITENING's already proven data links, making live feeds immediately available on the ground – a critical capability in our modern environment."

Details:

The ATDL is a replacement for the Plug-and-Play II data link and can be added to any fourth generation or newer LITENING pod, including the G4, SE, LDP, Color and Large Aperture variants. It incorporates an updated processor, software-defined radio, wideband antenna and improved data recorder. LITENING is the first targeting pod to include the BE-CDL waveform, which enhances interoperability and increases data transfer rates for video, still images and metadata. Previous LITENING data link integrations include NET-T, which functions

like a secure airborne Wi-Fi router, and other data terminals including the Mobile Ad-hoc Network and Freedom 550 radios which can connect multiple users across aircraft generations and domains.

LITENING is an electro-optical/infrared targeting pod on aircrafts that detects, acquires, identifies and tracks targets at extended ranges. LITENING enables a wide range of missions, including precision targeting, air superiority, close air support, surveillance and humanitarian assistance. The pod's modular design allows for upgrades over time to keep pace with evolving mission needs. Northrop Grumman has delivered more than 900 LITENING pods to U.S. and international customers.

USS Wasp Amphibious Ready Group Returning from Deployment



Aircraft assigned to the “Blue Knights” of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 365 (Reinforced) operate with the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp (LHD 1) in the Atlantic Ocean, Nov. 22, 2024. (U.S. Navy photo by MCC Ruben Reed)
From Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command

The USS Wasp Amphibious Ready Group, consisting of warships USS Wasp (LHD 1), USS New York (LPD 21), and USS Oak Hill (LSD 51), is scheduled to return to Hampton Roads on Dec. 6 following a seven-month deployment to the U.S. 6th Fleet areas of operations.

Marines assigned to the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) previously departed the ARG ships and returned to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

While deployed, the Wasp ARG and 24th MEU (SOC) team supported a wide range of interoperability opportunities and exercises across the North Atlantic, Eastern Mediterranean, and Baltic region, increasing combat readiness and crisis response capabilities while strengthening relationships with both

Allies and partners.

FRCE Marks 150th F-35 Induction



Workers on the Fleet Readiness Center East (FRCE) F-35 Lightning II aircraft modification line confer with the pilot prior to conducting a functional check flight inspection on an F-35B at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point. This aircraft is the 150th fifth-generation fighter inducted by the depot. From Fleet Readiness Center East, Dec. 2, 2024

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – Fleet Readiness Center East (FRCE) marked a milestone in its support of the F-35 Lightning II program when the depot recently inducted and completed modifications on its 150th F-35 and returned the

aircraft to the Fleet.

FRCE is the lead site for depot-level maintenance on the F-35B Lightning II and has conducted modifications and repair on the Marine Corps' short takeoff-vertical landing variant of the aircraft since 2013. The depot has also worked with the F-35A (conventional takeoff and landing) and F-35C (carrier) variants.

"The F-35 plays such a crucial role in our national defense," said FRCE Commanding Officer Capt. Randy Berti. "It is the next-generation strike aircraft weapon systems for the Navy, Air Force, Marines and our allies. It gives our warfighters unprecedented capabilities. We're extremely proud of the support we provide for this aircraft.

"The F-35 was completely new when the first aircraft was inducted in 2013," continued Berti. "There were a lot of unknowns. Inducting our 150th F-35 highlights how far we've come and how dedicated and innovative our people are. They were constantly breaking new ground and they continue to do that today."

Dustin Schultz, an aircraft planner and estimator with FRCE's F-35 team, was one of those trailblazers.

"Everything was brand new in the beginning," said Schultz. "From engineering support to tooling and logistics, we were starting from scratch. We had one aircraft with six of us working on it. Now we have 130 artisans working on the F-35 alone. That's a lot of growth.

"We have other aircraft programs that are sundowning," he continued. "The F-35 is filling that gap now as we move forward."

According to Ike Rettenmair, FRCE's F-35 branch head, the depot's F-35 workload has grown exponentially over the years and is expected to expand further.

“I was in the hangar as a Harrier mechanic when the first F-35 rolled in,” said Rettenmair. “We’ve grown from that one stall to what will soon be multiple hangars of F-35s. The F-35 plays such a significant role in the U.S. military with more and more continuing to enter the Fleet. The number of F-35s used by international partners is also growing. Our F-35 workload goes hand in hand with all of this.”

As the F-35 program continues to grow at the depot, Rettenmair said FRCE continues to expand and develop key F-35 support elements.

FRCE declared capability on its first F-35 component – meaning FRCE is now a verified source of repair and testing for that item – in 2020. Since then, the depot has declared capability on approximately 76 different components for the Lightning II and continues to stand up capability.

In 2023, FRCE personnel became the first within the Department of Defense to perform the successful assembly of a lift fan clutch for the F-35B Lightning II aircraft outside of the original manufacturer’s facility. Additionally, F-35B vertical lift fan testing and processing facilities are scheduled to come online at FRCE in early 2025.

The depot is also capable of bringing F-35 support to the warfighter when and where it’s needed. FRCE’s F-35 Rapid Response Team, made up of highly skilled, cross-trained aircraft maintenance professionals, can deploy at a moment’s notice to any location, from a Marine Corps Air Station halfway around the globe to a Navy aircraft carrier afloat in the Indo-Pacific region.

FRCE’s F-35 support isn’t limited to aircraft repair and modification or component capabilities. Don Werner, an aircraft planner and estimator with FRCE’s F-35 team, said the lessons learned and the innovation that occurred over the years while expanding FRCE’s F-35 program have also found

their way to the warfighter.

“There are so many entities within FRC East working on things you would never even think of,” said Werner. “They create things and come up with ideas that enable us to get aircraft to the warfighter even faster while saving money in the long run. They create things that make the job easier and these go out to the whole Fleet.”

In addition to mechanics, Werner said the team includes quality assurance personnel, parts and logistics experts, planners, engineers and even fabric workers who design and produce heavy-duty protective covers for the aircraft’s tires, intakes and other parts.

“You can see people right here at the depot working on all these things,” said Werner. “They’re designing it, going down to manufacturing and coming up with the tools or equipment our people need because there’s nobody out there that’s going to get it to us in such a timely manner.”

Schultz said the warfighter benefits from the innovative processes and procedures the depot’s F-35 team has come up with over the years.

“We’ve had many modifications that come through here that we were performing for the first time ever,” said Schultz. “The manufacturer would say this mod is going to take 10,000 hours and our artisans and engineers would go look at it and end up saving thousands of hours because they came up with a new way to do the job that nobody else had thought of.”

According to Rettenmair, the success and expansion of the F-35 program at FRCE, lies with the depot’s personnel. He credited their dedication and innovation as instrumental in establishing the reputation of FRCE’s F-35 program.

“We’ve made a name for ourselves as the F-35 facility for depot maintenance,” said Rettenmair. “It shows the trust and

confidence the enterprise has in FRC East to do this work. That trust is a testament to the people working here who've earned us this reputation."

He said everyone at FRCE, no matter what their job, is committed to supporting the Fleet by providing the highest quality, combat ready aircraft and components.

"Every day when we come to work, we know why we're here," said Rettenmair. "We deliver product back to the Fleet so the warfighter has what he or she needs to fight and win. The people working here take a lot of pride in that."

FRCE is North Carolina's largest maintenance, repair, overhaul and technical services provider, with more than 4,000 civilian, military and contract workers. Its annual revenue exceeds \$1 billion. The depot provides service to the fleet while functioning as an integral part of the greater U.S. Navy; Naval Air Systems Command; and Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers.

Gulfstream Again Selected for C-20, C-37 Fleet Support



Gulfstream Special Missions Awarded Significant Contract to Service U.S. Military Aircraft

From Gulfstream Aerospace Corp.

SAVANNAH, Ga., November 22, 2024 – Gulfstream Aerospace Corp., a business unit of General Dynamics (NYSE:GD), has been [awarded](#) a contractor logistics support services (CLS) contract from the U.S. Air Force Life Cycle Management Center for C-20 and C-37 fleets. This contract extends over a seven-year period and provides services to the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Army and U.S. Coast Guard.

“For nearly 60 years, Gulfstream has been a trusted partner to governments and military organizations worldwide, and we are honored that the U.S. Air Force has once again selected our company to support the U.S. military’s fleet,” said Mark Burns, president, Gulfstream. “This demonstrates the strength of our world-class Customer Support network and its ability to support all of our customers’ missions. Gulfstream’s Special Missions business delivers cutting-edge aircraft expertly

engineered for a wide range of critical operations and is currently experiencing unprecedented activity with customers around the world.”

The latest CLS contract is valued at \$991 million and includes a wide variety of support such as global maintenance, component overhaul, repair and modification services. Gulfstream Customer Support will perform the work at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland; Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii; Ramstein Air Base, Germany; Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay; and Naval Base Ventura County, California.

To date, Gulfstream has delivered more than 200 special missions aircraft to over 40 countries, including all branches of the U.S. military and key U.S. government agencies.

HII Hosts Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Eric Smith at Ingalls Shipbuilding



PASCAGOULA, Miss., Nov. 20, 2024 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) – HII’s (NYSE: HII) Ingalls Shipbuilding division welcomed Gen. Eric Smith, the 39th commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, for an official visit to the shipyard on Wednesday. During his visit, Smith met with Ingalls leadership and toured the shipyard, including two amphibious warships currently under construction, *Bougainville* (LHA 8) and *Harrisburg* (LPD 30).

“We were honored to highlight the critical work our Ingalls shipbuilders do every day in support of the Navy and Marine Corps team,” Ingalls Shipbuilding Vice President of Quality and Engineering and incoming President Brian Blanchette said. “Every amphibious ship built at Ingalls reflects the dedication, skill, and patriotism of our shipbuilders, as we work together to deliver ships that ensure our nation’s safety and strengthen our commitment to those who serve.”

This was Smith’s first visit since the Navy announced [the amphibious multi-ship procurement contract](#) in September for the construction of three *San Antonio*-class (LPD 17) amphibious ships (LPD 33-35) and a contract modification for the next *America*-class (LHA 6) large-deck amphibious ship *Helmand Province* (LHA 10).

A photo accompanying this release is available at: <https://hii.com/news/hii-hosts-marine-corps-commandant-gen-eric-smith-at-ingalls-shipbuilding/>.

“The multi-ship contract is a big step in the right direction; it benefits the DOD, American taxpayers, and industry,” Smith said. “The hardworking Americans here are serving our nation through the construction of these amphibious warships.”

To date, Ingalls has delivered 13 *San Antonio*-class ships and 15 large-deck amphibious ships to the U.S. Navy. Currently, the LHA production line includes the construction of *Bougainville* (LHA 8) and *Fallujah* (LHA 9). In addition, Ingalls has two Flight II LPDs under construction including *Harrisburg* (LPD 30) and *Pittsburgh* (LPD 31). Pre-construction activities are currently underway for the construction of *Philadelphia* (LPD 32), the 16th ship in the *San Antonio* class.

Marine Squadron Circles Globe, Aiding International Mission in Africa



MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR, Calif. – Marines with Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron (VMGR) 352 circumnavigated the globe aboard a KC-130J Super Hercules. The flight began and ended at the squadron’s home base of Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California, and involved 11 strategic stops across Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific regions.

The primary mission of the VMGR-352 “Raiders” was to deliver equipment and Marines to 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing squadrons deployed to Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, in support of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. The 10 pilots and crewmembers that participated enhanced their proficiency and earned critical qualifications through long-distance flights, honing their skills in navigation and logistical operations over extended ranges and varied conditions.

“Our global flight showcased the capability of the KC-130J to extend the operational reach of Third MAW,” said Lt. Col. Mark

Bock, commanding officer of VMGR-352. "More importantly, the operation demonstrated the readiness and skill of the Marines who fix and fly our aircraft."

Headquartered at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, CJTF-HOA is the only enduring U.S. military presence in Africa, tasked to promote regional stability, build partner nation military capacity, and protect U.S. and partner interests. A detachment from VMGR-352 has been deployed to Camp Lemonnier since May 2024 providing air-to-air refueling, combat assault transport, and air drop capability to CJTF-HOA and other partners in the region.

"CJTF-HOA is made up of various units throughout the joint force," said U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Nathan Fluker, KC-130J Detachment OIC at Camp Lemonnier. "The capabilities Third MAW brings are unique and play a vital role in crisis response as well as supporting partner nations."

The mission spotlighted the versatility of the Marine Corps' KC-130J Super Hercules. With a range exceeding 3,500 nautical miles and a 57,500-pound fuel offload capacity using wing and external tanks, "hercs" excel in long-distance logistics and refueling of both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft, on the ground and in the air. The KC-130J's ability to carry up to 92 troops while also serving as a flying gas station and cargo bay made it ideal for delivering Marines and equipment to Camp Lemonnier. Its multi-role nature, capable of tactical transport, air delivery, and air-to-air refueling, underscores its value in supporting diverse missions across the globe.

"The flight in support of deployed units enabled mission success by delivering required bulky supply parts that would have taken weeks to ship by other means," Fluker said.

The flight path to Djibouti comprised stops in the Indo-Pacific region, among them Wake Island, Guam, Singapore, and

Diego Garcia. The return to Miramar included stops in Qatar, Greece, England, and Maine.

These stops were not only logistically necessary, ensuring refueling and resupply needed to traverse vast distances, but also strategically impactful, showcasing the Marine Corps' ability to operate seamlessly across different continents and strengthen relationships with partner nations.

“Disparate stops require us to comply with different national rules and regulations and build relationships,” Bock said. “This experience and those relationships make our squadron better prepared to operate globally.”

VMGR-352's successful global flight underscores the vital role of Marine Corps aviation in supporting U.S. operations across multiple theaters. As both a deliberate mission and a training opportunity, the Raiders increased their proficiency and global deployment readiness.

“Marines are ready to win in any clime or place, and the Raiders of VMGR-352 are no exception,” Bock said. “It's an honor to be leading this team.”

Marine Corps General Officer Announcements

From the U.S. Department of Defense, Nov. 19, 2024

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III announced today that the president has made the following nominations:

Marine Corps Col. Timothy S. Brady Jr. for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Brady is currently serving as assistant chief of staff, G-3, Marine Forces Pacific, Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii.

Marine Corps Col. Dustin J. Byrum for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Byrum is currently serving as executive assistant to the deputy commandant, Aviation, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Col. Henry Dolberry Jr. for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Dolberry is currently serving as chief of staff, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Okinawa, Japan.

Marine Corps Col. Lauren S. Edwards for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Edwards is currently serving as senior military advisor, Office of the Secretary of the Navy, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Col. Christopher M. Haar for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Haar is currently serving as executive assistant to the deputy commandant, Installations and Logistics Department, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Col. Sean P. Hoewing for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Hoewing is currently serving as director, Air Combat Element, Capabilities Development Directorate, Combat Development and Integration, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Col. Ryan M. Hoyle for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Hoyle is currently serving as assistant chief of staff, G-3, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, California.

Marine Corps Col. David C. Hyman for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Hyman is currently serving as branch head, Manpower Management Officer Assignments, Manpower and

Reserve Affairs, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Col. Robert T. Meade for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Meade is currently serving as military assistant to the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Col. Joel F. Schmidt for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Schmidt is currently serving as executive assistant to the deputy commandant, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Col. Jeremy S. Winters for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Winters is currently serving as assistant chief of staff, Joint Force Headquarters, U.S. Cyber Command, Fort Meade, Maryland.

U.S. Marine Squadron Conducts First Combat Strikes Using F-35Cs Against Houthi Targets in Yemen



U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (Nov. 11, 2024) An F-35C Lightning II, attached to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 314, prepares to launch from the flight deck of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72). (This photo has been altered for security purposes by blurring out names on aircraft) (Official U.S. Navy Photo)

By Carrier Strike Group 3 Public Affairs | November 18, 2024

U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY – U.S. Marine Corps F-35C Lightning II aircraft, assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 314, conducted the first F-35C combat air strikes for the platform, Nov. 9-10.

VMFA 314, assigned to Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 9 aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), conducted multiple strikes on Houthi weapons storage facilities within Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen. The facilities housed conventional weapons, including anti-ship missiles. The Iranian-backed Houthis used these weapons to target U.S. and international military and civilian vessels navigating international waters in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

“The F-35C demonstrated its warfighting advantage by

transiting contested airspace and striking targets in the heart of Houthi territory over multiple days,” said U.S. Marine Lt. Col. Jeffrey “Wiki” Davis, commanding officer of VMFA 314. “My Marines are honored to be first to fight with the F-35C.”

The F-35C is a fifth-generation, long-range stealth fighter jet used by the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force, and is a multi-role aircraft able to perform a variety of missions, including air-to-air combat, air-to-ground strikes, reconnaissance and electronic warfare.

“The offensive and defensive capabilities of the F-35C absolutely enhance our air wing’s striking arm,” said U.S. Navy Capt. Gerald “Dutch” Tritz, commander, CVW 9. “The now battle-tested Air Wing of the Future has proven itself a game changer across all carrier air wing missions.”

Other variants of the aircraft include the F-35A and the F-35B. The F-35B first saw combat in 2018 when units assigned to the Essex Amphibious Ready Group conducted airstrikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan and ISIS in Syria. Air Force F-35A’s first combat mission was completed the year after against ISIS targets in Iraq.

The “Black Knights” of VMFA 314, based out of Miramar, Calif., transitioned from the F-18 to the F-35C in 2020, making them the first fleet squadron in both the Navy and Marine Corps to operate the 5th Generation fighter aircraft. VMFA 314 was also the first operational Marine squadron to fly the F-4 Phantom and F-18 Hornet.

VMFA 314, part of 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, is the only deployed F-35C squadron in the Marine Corps.