

VMFA-542 achieves full operational capability as U.S. Marine Corps' first F-35 operational squadron on the East Coast



From Communication Strategy and Operations Office,

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

Apr. 5, 2024

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), achieved full operational capability, Wednesday, as the U.S. Marine Corps' first East Coast F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter squadron in the Fleet Marine Force.

Full operational capability means that VMFA-542 is ready for full operations and completed its transition from a legacy tactical-aircraft platform to the F-35B Lightning II. The squadron is now capable and eligible to deploy globally in support of planned or contingency operations. As 2nd MAW's first operational fifth-generation fighter-attack squadron, they can fulfill their mission essential tasks (METs) in support of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). These METs include close-air support, strike, strike coordination and reconnaissance, offensive anti-air warfare, suppression of enemy air defenses, electronic attack, electronic support, and active air defense.

"Achieving full operational capability is a testament to the exceptional hard work and professionalism from the Marines of VMFA-542," said Lt. Col. Brian Hansell, commanding officer of VMFA-542. "This milestone marks the addition of a battle-ready aviation squadron with unmatched combat lethality and survivability to the Marine Expeditionary Force. We are ready and able to conduct missions globally in support of the MAGTF as we continue to prepare for the next challenge."

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-35B Lightning II is the short-takeoff and vertical-landing F-35 variant. This capability allows the aircraft to operate from amphibious assault ships and expeditionary airstrips less than 2,000 feet long.

VMFA-542 began its transition to the F-35B Lightning II in December 2022 and received its first F-35B on May 31, 2023. The squadron then achieved initial operational capability, Feb. 5, before receiving its 10th aircraft, March 25, and achieving full operational capability, April 3.

The squadron also recently participated in Exercise Nordic Response 24 in Norway, which was a two-week exercise with NATO allies and partners demonstrating military prowess across land, maritime, and aviation domains against challenging arctic and mountainous conditions. During the exercise, VMFA-542 conducted a distributed-aviation-operations event at Kallax Air Base in Lulea, Sweden, March 13, marking the first time a U.S. F-35 Lightning II aircraft landed in Sweden, the first time any F-35 operated at Kallax Air Base, and one of the first training events conducted by Sweden as a NATO member.

VMFA-542 is a subordinate unit of 2nd MAF, the aviation combat element of II Marine Expeditionary Force.

**Metal Shark Set to Debut
Autonomous, Amphibious, Semi-
Submersible “Prowler”
Military Interceptor and
“Frenzy” Micro-USV**



JEANERETTE, La. – *April 4th, 2024*: Louisiana-based boat builder Metal Shark has announced the debut of “Prowler,” a versatile military craft combining multiple unique technologies to meet the current and near future warfighting requirements of the US military and its allies. The company is also debuting “Frenzy,” a high-performance, low-cost, amphibious micro-USV with a payload carrying capacity of up to 14 lbs.

Merging autonomous, amphibious, and semi-submersible capabilities with the performance and seakeeping characteristics of a slender deep-vee monohull surface craft, Prowler has been designed to address operational challenges identified by the United States Navy and Marine Corps, two key Metal Shark clients.

“Prowler represents the sum total of everything we’ve learned while building 400-plus autonomous and remote operated vessels for our military customers over the past decade,” said Metal Shark CEO Chris Allard. “Every aspect of Prowler’s intended operation draws from proven technology. Prowler delivers massive increases in lethality and versatility, merging multiple capabilities into a compact, flexible, lower-cost

platform ready for volume production.”

Fully amphibious and capable of autonomous or remote operation on land or at sea, Prowler offers drastically simplified launch and recovery compared to traditional vessels. Prowler is capable of self-launch and self-recovery at boat ramps, without a prime mover or trailer, or from the well deck of an amphibious ship, with no need for cumbersome cradles or dollies. Prowler’s low-speed crawl enables autonomous or remote operation on land, allowing vessels to be staged and maneuvered with minimal effort.

Prowler operates on land via a proprietary electric-drive system developed by Metal Shark, which uses low-pressure, high-traction tires mated to dedicated motors for propulsion and steering. Hydraulic rams raise and lower front and rear wheels for operation on land or at sea. Rear wheels are equipped with OTR-certified tires and marine brakes, and Prowler features DOT-compliant lighting. This allows Prowler to be transported over the road behind a conventional prime mover with no trailer, greatly simplifying logistics for operators.

Propelled by a 300-horsepower Volvo Penta D6 Aquamatic inboard diesel engine and stern drive, the 30-foot, welded-aluminum Prowler operates as a typical surface vessel while underway, with a deep-vee planing hull delivering a 35-knot sprint speed and 500 nautical mile range.

Designed for extended loitering in a semi-submerged state, Prowler’s large integrated ballast tanks flood when the vessel is static. In loitering mode, Prowler’s decks are near the waterline, with only the vessel’s arch-style communications mast visible above the water. Semi-submersion reduces Prowler’s operational profile while also improving stability for sensors, surveillance and weapons systems.

Prowler’s mast carries an array of communications equipment

and a situational awareness ensemble for autonomous or remote operation, and can be equipped with port and starboard launch tubes for the deployment of loitering smart drones or other weapons. The mast also serves as the air intake for Prowler's diesel engine. A lithium-ion battery or optional generator power pack supports station keeping, surveillance, guidance, and communications systems during extended loitering periods of up to a week.

The lift from Prowler's planing hull design allows the vessel to quickly climb to the surface from its submerged state to resume normal operation once the surveillance mission concludes.

Prowler is equipped with a computer networked system able to support a multitude of UMAA-compliant command and control, autonomy, targeting, and AI software packages. Prowler's system architecture provides the forward flexibility to accommodate third party software and/or hardware upgrades to support collaborative intercept capability or other technologies as they may be required.

Prowler's computer system, along with propulsion, mechanical, and electrical systems are contained within a single removable module to allow for expedited onsite servicing, repair, upgrade, or replacement with no need to transport the vessel.

Prowler can simultaneously carry multiple payloads, with 1,000 lbs. of total payload carrying capacity. In addition to the aforementioned smart loitering drones, Prowler can carry up to twelve "Frenzy" amphibious micro USVs, which are carried on deck and self-launched on their own wheels via Prowler's stern ramp. Designed and built by Metal Shark, the Frenzy features electric waterjet propulsion, carries a payload of up to 14 lbs., and, like Prowler, can loiter in a semi-submerged state.

"I've been toying with the notion of this little gizmo ever

since we began designing the Long Range Unmanned Surface Vessel (LRUSV) for the Marine Corps,” said Mr. Allard, speaking of the Frenzy micro USV. “There’s a huge need for attritable USVs in a compact form factor, and very few sources. Frenzy will serve this demand, and putting Frenzy onboard Prowler makes perfect sense. Pairing an over-the-horizon capable USV with micro-USVs delivers a one-two punch capability, keeping the key asset safe while allowing the attritable drones to do their job, all while being watched from the sky.”

Prowler and Frenzy will make their public debut April 8th through 10th at Sea-Air-Space 2024 in National Harbor, Maryland, before returning to Metal Shark’s Louisiana facilities for further testing and development.

“We challenged the men and women of Metal Shark to dream big and to think outside the box to bring Prowler and Frenzy to life in an accelerated timeframe, and I am blown away by their talent, energy, and dedication to this project,” said Mr. Allard. “I look forward to showing off the ingenuity and hard work of our people next week at Sea-Air-Space.”

Kratos Demonstrates XQ-58A Electronic Warfare Capabilities for Marine Corps



From Kratos Defense, April 2, 2024

SAN DIEGO, April 02, 2024 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) – Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, Inc. (NASDAQ:KTOS), a leading National Security Solutions provider, announced that Kratos Unmanned Systems Division has successfully demonstrated the ability of the XQ-58A to fly in concert with two F-35 aircraft and the ability to deliver an integrated electronic attack (EA) capability on the XQ-58A Valkyrie aircraft during a live flight test event at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. The demonstration completes the first phase of the United States Marine Corps’ Penetrating Affordable Autonomous Collaborative Killer – Portfolio (PAACK-P) program. Flight test support was provided by the 40th Flight Test Squadron, 96th Test Wing. All flight test objectives were successfully met.

The demonstration follows the award of a \$22.9M “Phase 2” contract modification on December 4, 2023 for additional engineering development and flight test demonstrations, and marks a significant milestone in the PAACK-P program as the Headquarters Marine Corps Aviation Cunningham Group and Advanced Development Team, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and

Engineering (OUSD(R&E)), the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR), and Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD) AIRWorks continue to inform MQ-58B requirements for the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Expeditionary (MUX) Tactical Aircraft (TACAIR) for use in a Suppression of Enemy Air Defense (SEAD) role.

The XQ-58A's advanced EA payload autonomously detected, identified, and geolocated multiple tactically relevant targets of interest, transmitted emitter target track coordinates to collaborative assets, and successfully presented non-kinetic electronic attack effects against multiple emitters. Flying since 2019, the Kratos XQ-58A Valkyrie is a high-performance, runway-independent tactical UAV capable of long-range flights at high-subsonic speeds. The Valkyrie can serve as a loyal wingman, conduct single UAS operations, or operate in swarms. Combining affordability, survivability, long-range, high-subsonic speeds, maneuverability, and ability to carry flexible mission kit configurations and mix of lethal weapons from its internal bomb bay and wing stations, the XQ-58A provides unmatched operational flexibility at an affordable price for multiple Department of Defense customers.

"MUX TACAIR promises to increase the lethality and survivability of our current crewed platforms," said Lt. Col. Bradley Buick, Cunningham Group Capabilities, Research, and Integration Officer. "These platforms are the future of air warfare."

Steve Fendley, president of Kratos Unmanned Systems Division, said, "We're very excited about the mission capability demonstrated during the flight and the incredible effectiveness per cost that this enables; not to mention the elimination of risk to a human pilot, and elimination of risk to expensive manned platforms. We're proud to be pioneering these technologies with our integrated autonomous aircraft systems that truly validate the DoD's goal of achieving

effective, survivable, affordable mass. We are humbled to support the vision and drive of our Marine's customer who has charted the course for these critical 21st century capabilities and proud to be working as a collective team with Kratos high performance uncrewed jets, Northrop Grumman's leading technology EW systems, and the Marine Corps."

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing Marines receive last AV-8B Harrier pilot designations



An AV-8B Harrier II of Marine Attack Squadron 223. Photo by [Senior Master Sgt. Joshua Allmaras](#)

2nd Lt. John W. Graham, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing Public Affairs, 1 Apr 2024

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – The AV-8B Harrier II Fleet Replacement Detachment (FRD), Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 14, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), graduated the final two pilots to receive the 7509 Military Occupational

Specialty (MOS) at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina, Friday.

Capt. Joshua Corbett and Capt. Sven Jorgensen completed their final training flight at the FRD in order to receive the 7509 MOS, which is reserved for AV-8B Harrier II qualified pilots. The flight, a low-altitude close air support training sortie, represents the culmination of the Marines' training at the FRD.

"The significance of the last replacement pilot training flight in the Harrier community is that it is the beginning of the end for us as a community," said Corbett. "The Harrier, more than many aircraft than I have come across, elicits an emotional response. For members of the public, members of the aviation community, members of the Marine community, and especially members of the Harrier pilot community, it's bittersweet. All good things have to come to an end, and it's our turn soon, but not yet."

The Harrier is a vertical/short takeoff and landing (VSTOL) tactical attack aircraft. The first AV-8B Harrier II arrived at MCAS Cherry Point in January 1984. In their 40-year presence in the eastern North Carolina region, 2nd MAW Harriers, and the 7509s that pilot them, have supported numerous operations across the globe, including Operation Desert Storm, Operation Allied Force in 1999 in the former Yugoslavia, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Corbett's and Jorgensen's designation represents 2nd MAW's continued operational transition from legacy fixed-wing tactical aircraft, such as the Harrier.

As the Harrier transitions out of the Fleet Marine Force, its role is being filled by the F-35B Lightning II. Marine Attack Squadron (VMA) 223 will be the last Harrier squadron in the Marine Corps and is set to continue operating the platform through September 2026. Until then, the platform will continue to call MCAS Cherry Point home and execute deployed operations

as part of Marine Expeditionary Units.

“I am incredibly proud of the legacy of the AV-8B, both within Marine Aviation and here in eastern North Carolina.” said Lt. Col. Nathaniel Smith, the Commanding Officer of VMA-223. “Our platform is part of the fabric of eastern North Carolina, as countless Marines, sailors, and civilians have contributed to our success for decades. It is exciting to see our last two students graduate from the FRD and hit the fleet. Our team of pilots, maintainers, and supporting staff have done outstanding work in supporting both the FRD and VMA missions here at VMA-223, and I look forward to us continuing to support 2nd MAW and the MAGTF at home and overseas.”

Both pilots will report to VMA-223 after completing the FRD syllabus.

First AH-1Z to Receive SIEPU Upgrade Arrives at Bell Amarillo Assembly Center



The Bell AH-1Z arrives at the assembly center for the SIEUP modification. *Bell Textron*

AMARILLO, Texas – The first Bell AH-1Z set to receive the Structural Improvement Electrical Power Upgrade (SIEPU) modification to be provided by Bell Textron Inc. under a contract with the U.S. Marine Corps has arrived at Bell's Amarillo Assembly Center.

SIEPU modifications optimize the aircraft to improve mission capabilities, aircrew safety and interoperability by increasing the electrical power capacity on the aircraft and supporting the integration of additional cabin capabilities. SIEPU marks the start of the next chapter in the life of domestic H-1 helicopters, following the completion of the U.S. Marine Corps Program of Record in November 2022.

"The Bell AH-1Z Viper and UH-1Y Venom provide the backbone of attack and utility aviation support in the various battlespaces in which they are used, so SIEPU comes at an

important time for the future strategic implementation of this platform,” said Mike Deslatte, Bell H-1 senior vice president and program director. “SIEPU will be immediately beneficial for today’s operations, and also sets the H-1 up to quickly support future operational needs, some that may not even be conceived of yet.”

With SIEPU, H-1s will be able to upgrade to current weapons systems with next-generation capabilities, including kinetic long-range munitions and air launched effects as well as new non-kinetic capabilities. These upgrades greatly extend reach and range while simultaneously enhancing standoff distance.

While the H-1s have already demonstrated their capability to counter enemy unmanned aerial systems, SIEPU will also allow for there to be enough on-board power capacity for future weapons that are yet to be implemented.

“We are confident that SIEPU will help the Marine Corps expand mission essential tasks with more mission flexibility,” said Danielle Markham, SIEPU program manager. “The important thing is to make sure the H-1 is in a position to take advantage of those opportunities as they become available.”

Prior to arriving at the Bell Amarillo Assembly Center, the AH-1Z and UH-1Y completed datalink capabilities testing with the Marine Corps modifications at Camp Pendleton and testing with VMX-1 in Yuma. Bell plans to continue supporting the AH-1Z Viper and UH-1Y Venom through the 2040s in alignment with the Marine Corps Aviation Plan.

First of its Kind Deployment of Marine Cyber Forces to the INDO-PACOM Theater



Story by [Maj. Zachary Leuthardt](#), [U.S. Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command](#)

OKINAWA, Japan – Marines assigned to U.S. Marine Corps Forces Cyber Command deployed to Okinawa, Japan as part of the inaugural iteration of a new cyber rotational force concept.

The cyber rotational force concept brings experts in defensive cyber operations to assist tactical and operational units stationed with geographic combatant commands.

“Cyber defense is crucial, and as our capabilities continually mature, it is important that we support the warfighters and

units tasked with ensuring our competitive edge throughout the globe,” said Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Ryan P. Heritage, the commander of MARFORCYBER. “Ensuring we have the skills and resources to maintain resilient, reliable networks to support rapid decision making at every level is at the heart of what we do. This is just another step in realizing that goal.”

The team, made up of defensive cyber operations professionals assigned to MARFORCYBER, will join with defensive cyber operations Marines assigned to III Marine Expeditionary Force.

Their mission will be to harden Marine Corps and joint networks in order to better enable the maneuver of units throughout the Western Pacific, knowing that critical infrastructure, networks and systems are effectively monitored and secured.

The forward deployment of cyber forces to operational theaters such as the INDOPACIFIC, is one way MARFORCYBER is assisting units’ operational and tactical network resiliency in challenging environments.

“Protecting critical networks located inside the weapons engagement zone of several regional adversaries is essential to our ability to physically and virtually maneuver,” said Lt. Gen. William M. Journey, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific. “We are excited to work with MARFORCYBER on the cyber rotational force concept and, look forward to the resilience and flexibility their experts can provide our force.”

While the cyber rotational force’s immediate mission is to harden the networks units in the Western Pacific rely upon to complete their mission, it is also a chance to refine the tactics that will be needed in future conflicts against sophisticated adversaries.

“As the threat to our critical cyber infrastructure evolves, it is essential that the Marine Corps be able to defend our forward deployed networks,” Journey said. “This will be crucial to the Marine Corps’ development of the expeditionary advance basing and stand-in force concepts.”

MV-22B Ospreys Begin Reintegration with 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit



Story by [Capt. Brian Tuthill, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit](#)

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. – The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit began MV-22B Osprey reintegration training

March 21, transporting a platoon of Marines across Camp Pendleton to regain proficiencies in foundational skills for pilots and infantry Marines.

The training was conducted at two sites and involved a section of MV-22B Ospreys from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 165 (Reinforced), part of the aviation combat element of the 15th MEU, and Marines with Bravo Company, Battalion Landing Team 1/5, the 15th MEU's ground combat element.

Bravo Company is BLT 1/5's airborne assault company for the 15th MEU.

"This type of reintegration training is an important step in returning our pilots and enlisted aircrew to full proficiency and readiness to support the 15th MEU," said Lt. Col. Drew Bossart, the commanding officer of VMM-165 (Rein.). "We continue to follow the Marine Corps' deliberate, three-phased approach as our pilots regain basic flight currency, rebuild our instructor cadre, and achieve proficiencies. I am fully confident in our aircraft and that our pilots and aircrews will soon achieve a high state of operational readiness."

Pilots first landed Ospreys at Camp Pendleton's helicopter outlying landing field, or HOLF, in the San Mateo area. The HOLF has a section that matches the flight deck dimensions of a U.S. Navy amphibious assault ship, which allows pilots to simulate landing on a ship. The pilots exited their aircraft to meet with leaders from Bravo Company on the ground and provided instructions to the Marines waiting to board the aircraft. Bravo Company Marines then conducted multiple boarding and disembarking drills at the HOLF in the same manner they did previously during at-sea training aboard USS Boxer (LHD 4).

Following the landing zone drills in San Mateo, VMM-165 (Rein.) pilots transported Bravo Company Marines to a confined

area landing site in the Las Flores area. The CAL site is a landing zone that requires pilots to maneuver around obstacles such as trees, powerlines, or buildings to land. These types of landings prepare pilots and crew chiefs for unpredictable terrain and situations they may encounter in an expeditionary environment. Bravo Company Marines exited the aircraft and established security to simulate how they would insert and extract at a landing zone during a mission before reembarking the aircraft.

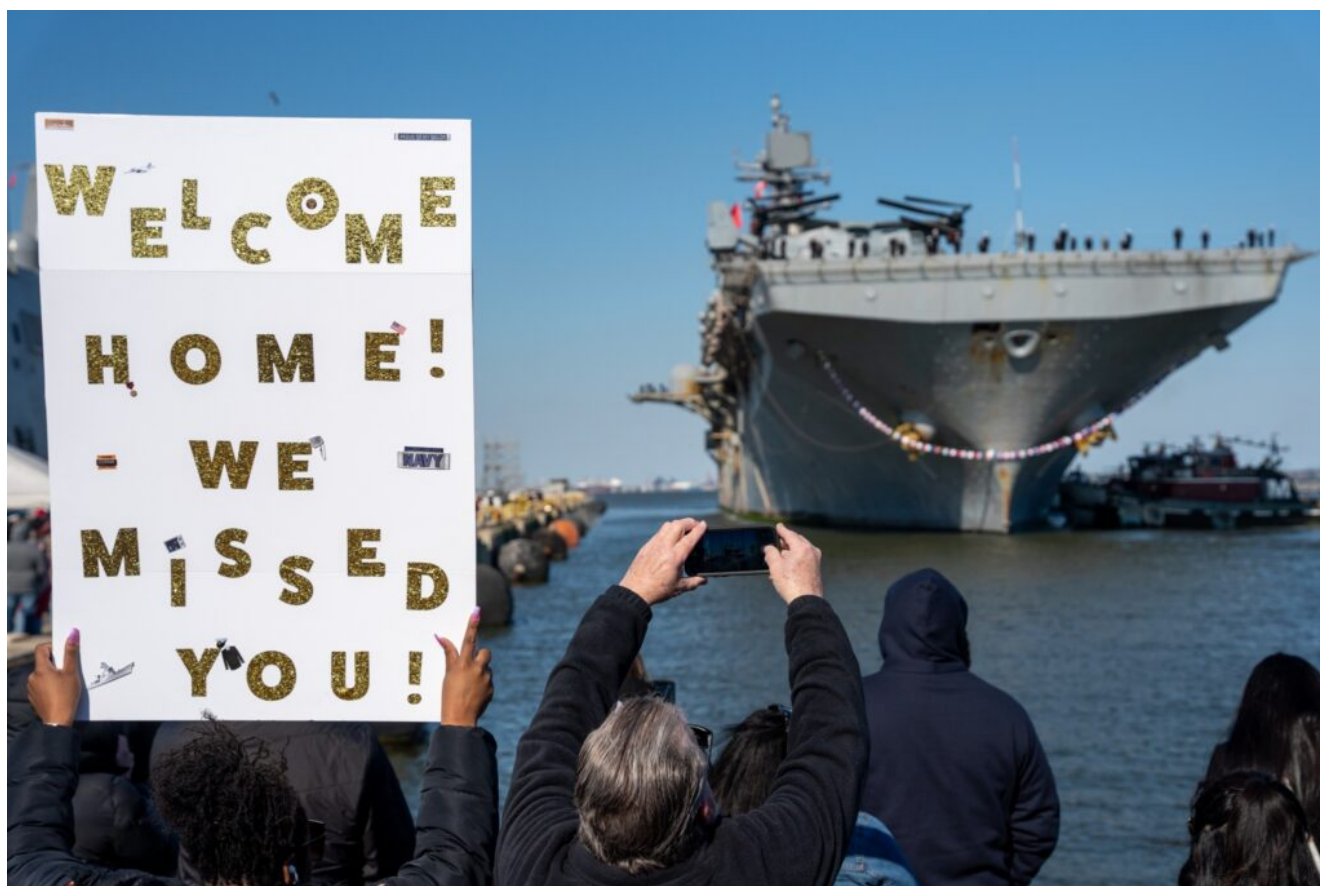
Following the training at the CAL site, Bravo Company's Marines were flown back to San Mateo for their final landing and the Ospreys returned to their squadron headquarters at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.

"MV-22s are the cornerstone of the 15th MEU's Marine Air-Ground Task Force, providing us unrivaled flexibility for expeditionary operations across the spectrum of military operations and movement from ship to shore," said Col. Sean Dynan, the commanding officer of the 15th MEU. "VMM-165's pilots and aircrews have the full support of the 15th MEU as they take a measured approach to progress through all requirements carefully and deliberately."

VMM-165 (Rein.) and the 15th MEU will continue to conduct progressive training events over the coming weeks, both ashore and at sea.

MV-22B Ospreys are multi-engine, dual-piloted, self-deployable, medium lift, vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) tiltrotor aircraft designed for combat assault support, combat service support, and special operations missions worldwide. Ospreys have the ability to carry 24 Marines and Sailors twice as fast and five times farther than previous helicopters, flying at 240 knots and up to 200 nautical miles.

Bataan ARG, 26th MEU(Soc) Return From 8-month Deployment



[By Chief Mass Communication Specialist Eva-Marie Ramsaran,
Amphibious Squadron 8 Public Affairs](#)

21 March 2024

NORFOLK, Virginia – More than 4,000 Sailors and Marines assigned to the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC)) returned to Hampton Roads following an eight and a half-month deployment to the U.S. 2nd, 5th and 6th Fleet areas of operations, March 21.

Two of the ARG ships, the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5) and Harpers Ferry-class dock landing ship USS Carter Hall (LSD 50), returned to Naval Station Norfolk and Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia.

“It is great to be home,” said Amphibious Squadron (CPR) 8 Commodore, Capt. Martin Robertson. “I’m proud of the Sailors and Marines of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group who return home today knowing that for eight and a half months, they were the nation’s rapid response force.”

The San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) is expected to return to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, in the coming days. Most of the Marines assigned to the 26th MEU(SOC) departed the ARG ships and returned to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina earlier this week.

While in the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of operations, the Bataan ARG and 26th MEU(SOC) team supported a wide range of interoperability opportunities and exercises across the North Atlantic, Eastern Mediterranean, Baltic region, Red Sea and Arabian Gulf, increasing combat readiness and crisis response capabilities while strengthening relationships with both Allies and partners.

“These young men and women were called into action from the start to help stop the spread of wildfires in Southern Europe, to deter Iran from seizing U.S.-flagged merchant vessels in the Middle East, and they reacted swiftly at the onset of the crisis in the Bab-El Mandeb to ensure merchant shipping access to the Red Sea,” Robertson said. “Your sons and daughters stood ready to assist American citizens in countries impacted by the Israel-Hamas conflict, and their efforts directly prevented the conflict from expanding to other nations in the region. Simultaneously, we operated close to Russia in the high north and Baltic regions, reinforcing America’s commitment to the NATO alliance, emphasizing the importance of regional peace and security. Thank you to our families and

friends. Your love and support made all our successes possible.”

In July 2023, following the wildfires in Greece, the Bataan ARG disaggregated, with Mesa Verde remaining in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations supporting Allies and partners through various bilateral exercises and operations across the theater. Mesa Verde and the embarked Marines visited Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom. Additionally, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro visited Mesa Verde while the ship was in Dublin, Ireland, for the U.S. Naval Academy versus University of Notre Dame football game, Aug. 26, 2023.

Bataan and Carter Hall transited the Suez Canal and operated in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations for more than four months, ensuring the free flow of navigation and regional stability. Following the outbreak of conflict between Israel and Hamas, both ships participated in Operation Prosperity Guardian in the Red Sea to deter further escalation and protect open sea lanes.

“It’s been a challenging deployment, but we have accomplished a lot, and I am extremely proud of the hard work and resilience of every member of the Bataan team,” said Capt. Paul Burkhart, Bataan’s commanding officer. “Throughout the past eight months, we have really shown what it means to be ‘Bataan tough.’ We were able to showcase our amphibious capabilities throughout three Navy fleets, deter aggression through our presence and were able to create and share countless memories that will last a lifetime.”

Notable visitors to the Bataan and Carter Hall included commanders and staff of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, U.S. 6th Fleet, U.S. 5th Fleet, U.S. Central Command, Task Force 61/2, Task Force 51/5, French, Italian and Turkish navies, along with distinguished guests from the Kingdom of Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

United Arab Emirates and U.K.

The ARG/MEU presence overseas supported strategic interests and contributed to regional security and stability and reassured U.S. commitment to multiple regions. The blue-green team provided operational flexibility to combatant commanders by providing a versatile contingency response force using sea, air, land and logistical assets. The versatility inherent to the amphibious force allowed for flexible and mission-tailored forces, while representing our nation's strength, capability and resolve to partners and Allies and deterring potential adversaries.

"History has proven the necessity of having forward-deployed Marines, embarked aboard amphibious ships. Over the past eight months, the Marines and Sailors of the 26th MEU(SOC) have showcased the value, utility and unique all-domain operational capabilities you only find in a marine expeditionary unit," said Col. Dennis Sampson, commanding officer of the 26th MEU(SOC). "When coupled together, the ARG and the MEU(SOC) form a flexible naval expeditionary force capable of reassuring our Allies and partners of our commitment to maritime security and capable of dominating within the littorals against any adversary in any clime or place."

The Bataan ARG is comprised of the Bataan, Mesa Verde, and Carter Hall. Embarked commands include CPR 8, Fleet Surgical Team 8, Tactical Air Control Squadron 21, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, Assault Craft Unit 4, Beach Master Unit 2 and the 26th MEU(SOC).

The 26th MEU(SOC) consists of the Command Element; Aviation Combat Element, Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 162 (Reinforced); Ground Combat Element, Battalion Landing Team 1/6; and Logistics Combat Element, Combat Logistics Battalion 22.

USMC Conducts First F-35 Landing in Sweden During Exercise Nordic Response



A U.S. Marine Corps pilot lands an F-35B Lightning II jet with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), at Lulea, Sweden, March 13, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Orlanys Diaz Figueroa)

Captain Jacob Sugg USMC, Exercise Nordic Response Media Information Center

15 Mar 2024

LULEA, Sweden—Four U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, and a KC-130J Super Hercules with Marine

Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252, 2nd MAW, conducted distributed aviation operations during Exercise Nordic Response 24 at Kallax Air Base in Lulea, Sweden, March 13, 2024.

Exercise Nordic Response, formerly known as Cold Response, is a NATO training event conducted every two years to promote military competency in arctic environments and to foster interoperability between the Marine Corps and allied nations.

The event marked the first time a U.S. F-35 Lightning II jet aircraft landed in Sweden, the first time any F-35 operated at Kallax Air Base, and one of the first training events conducted by Sweden as a NATO member.

“We’re thrilled to welcome the first American F-35 landing here at Kallax air force base, and it’s an F-35B from the U.S. Marine Corps,” said Swedish Brig. Gen. Tommy Petersson, deputy commander of the Swedish Air Force. “For the U.S. Marine Corps of course, it’s a part of the agile combat employment portion in the framework of the exercise we’re conducting together right now, Nordic Response 24.”

The preplanned event provided an opportunity for U.S. Marine Corps aviation platforms to use a Swedish air base and host-nation support to conduct aviation-delivered ground refueling from a U.S. KC-130J Super Hercules to U.S. F-35B JSF aircraft.

“Of course, this is of vital interest for Sweden as a new ally in NATO to further develop our ability for host-nation support, for instance for American assets,” said Petersson.

Distributed aviation operations is a method of generating aviation combat power through the coordinated employment of aviation squadrons, command-and-control agencies, aviation logistics, and aviation ground-support units disaggregated across the battlefield that challenges adversary targeting efforts. The 2nd MAW concept of DAO distributes command and

control of aviation forces across echelons of command, pushing authorities to the lowest levels, while keeping forces moving between airfields and air sites. It also integrates and builds interdependencies between the 2nd MAW and its allies and partners.

“This is an opportunity to work with our Swedish partners to exercise distributed aviation operations,” said U.S. Maj. Gen. Scott Benedict, commanding general of 2nd MAW. “We were able to launch our aircraft into a NATO training strike package, recover them back here in Sweden, refuel them via expeditionary means out of a KC-130, and get them back in the air for another sortie. This is our means to be able to operate in an environment where we are protected because of our mobility.”

Both VMFA-542 and VMGR-252 deployed from their home base of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina. VMFA-542 is the first East Coast operational F-35 squadron for the U.S. Marine Corps. Exercise Nordic Response 24 was VMFA-542’s first overseas exercise as an F-35B Lightning II jet squadron and since achieving initial operational capability on Feb. 5, 2024.

During the exercise, VMFA-542 employed its fifth-generation assets in a near-peer adversary training exercise while advancing and sustaining the squadron in core mission-essential tasks of anti-air warfare, active air defense, suppression-of-enemy air defense, and strike capabilities while progressing the squadron toward full operational capability. The squadron integrated with NATO allies across Northern Europe and with United Kingdom and Norwegian F-35 aircraft, showcasing the breadth and diversity of the Joint Strike Fighter program.

Throughout the exercise, VMGR-252 employed its KC-130J Super Hercules aircraft to support Marine Air-Ground Task Force objectives such as providing transportation of cargo, combat-

assault transport, aerial refueling, and aviation-delivered ground refueling to both U.S. and allied aircraft. They conducted aviation operations from expeditionary shore-based sites and cold-weather conditions to achieve training objectives and increase aircrew and loadmaster proficiencies.

Exercise Nordic Response 24 was a two-week exercise that brought together NATO allies and partners for a comprehensive demonstration of military prowess across land, maritime, and aviation domains. Against the backdrop of challenging arctic and mountainous conditions, participating military forces engaged in realistic force-on-force scenarios, showcasing their capabilities in both offensive and defensive operations.

“Our allies and partners have been living in this region for a long time, and they’ve developed similar capabilities themselves,” said Benedict. “As we partner with allies, it enables us to exercise what to do better and to learn from their experience operating here. We’re always better working together; opportunities to enable our concepts and operations alongside partners, while learning, gets the best of both worlds.”

Exercise Nordic Response 24 is a continuation of the record-breaking NATO exercise Steadfast Defender.

B-roll, imagery, and news stories of II MEF Marines participating in Exercise Nordic Response 24 can be found hyperlinked on [the Exercise Nordic Response DVIDS page](#).

Rite-Solutions Awarded \$60 Million NUWC Division Newport IT Services Contract



MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (March 18, 2024) – Rite-Solutions was recently awarded a \$60.7 million, five-year contract to support NUWC’s Activity Chief Information Officer (ACIO)/Information Technology (IT) division, which is responsible for strategic planning, operations, maintenance, and compliance of the center’s IT systems and infrastructure.

The company will provide IT services in several areas including software engineering, system administration, cybersecurity, client support services/help desk, Navy Marine Corps Intranet (NMCI) support, IT governance and application portfolio management support, and more.

“Cybersecurity touches every one of these areas,” notes Rocky Reeves, Rite-Solutions Sr Vice President and Director of IT Services. Over one-half of the personnel supporting this contract must meet the Navy’s strict Cybersecurity Workforce requirements. “This was a major reason Rite-Solutions won the contract. Many of our employees have degrees in cybersecurity or computer science as well as security and operating system certifications.”

“We are honored that NUWC chose to renew the contract with

us,” says Rite-Solutions co-founder Joe Marino. “While we are rapidly expanding into new technologies that give the Navy an Information Advantage, IT services and security remain a critical component of what we offer.”

The company is the prime contractor on the project and will work with subcontractors including SAIC, McLaughlin Research Corporation, Mikel, and others.

Rite-Solutions will support NUWC headquarters in Newport, R.I. as well as NUWC locations in Connecticut, Virginia, Florida, and the Bahamas.