Marine Corps to Retire Last AV-8B Harrier IIs in June

AV-8Bs of VMA-223 seen in flight in April 2023. (Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. Theodore Bergan)
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Marine Corps plans to retire its last Boeing AV-8B Harrier II vertical-takeoff and landing attack jets this summer, according to the 2026 Marine Corps Aviation Plan released Feb. 10, 2026.

The Corps operates only one remaining Marine attack squadron (VMA), VMA-223, which is based at Marine Corps Cherry Point, North Carolina. The squadron will conduct the last flight of a Harrier on June 3, during a series of ceremonies scheduled for June 1 through June 5.

VMA-223 currently has a detachment of AV-8Bs assigned to the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit deployed on board the

amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7). The Iwo Jima has been operating in the U.S. Southern Command's area of responsibility in support of Operations Southern Spear and Absolute Resolve. This is the last scheduled deployment of the AV-8B.

VMA-223 is scheduled to be redesignated a Marine fighter attack squadron in fiscal 2027 as it trains to fly the F-35B Lightning II short takeoff/vertical landing strike fighter.

The Marine Corps began flying Harriers in 1971, beginning with the AV-8A and later AV-8C versions. The much-improved AV-8B Harrier II version entered service in January 1985. Further upgrades resulted in the night-attack AV-8B(NA) version, with many further upgraded with radar as the AV-8B Harrier II Plus version.

AV-8Bs served in numerous combat operations, including Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield, Operation Allied Force, Operation Odyssey Dawn, Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, Operations Inherent Resolve and Resolute Support, and most recently in Operation Southern Spear.

"Equipped with precision-guided munitions (PGMs), an advanced LITENING targeting pod, and LINK-16, the Harrier has a distinguished legacy of destroying surface targets and escorting friendly aircraft, providing the Marine Corps with a relevant and survivable fight-tonight capability," the aviation plan said.

U.S. Marine Corps Selects GA-

ASI for MUX TACAIR Collaborative Combat Aircraft Program

GA-ASI's YFQ-42A Platform to Support Next-Generation Expeditionary Air Operations

From General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc.

SAN DIEGO – 10 February 2026 – General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI) was competitively selected by the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) for evaluation in the Marine Air-Ground Task Force Uncrewed Expeditionary Tactical Aircraft (MUX TACAIR) Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) program. The agreement integrates GA-ASI's expertise in autonomy and uncrewed aircraft systems with a government-provided mission package, using the YFQ-42A platform as a surrogate to evaluate integration with crewed fighters.

The contract initiates integration of a Marine Corps mission kit into the YFQ-42A surrogate platform for assessment within the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF).

The USMC contract includes the rapid development of autonomy for the government-supplied mission kit – a cost-effective, sensor-rich, software-defined suite capable of delivering kinetic and non-kinetic effects – positioning the solution for use in expeditionary operations. This work will support evaluations of future MUX TACAIR capabilities.

“This selection builds upon the GA-ASI autonomous systems in use today and demonstrates our commitment to delivering next generation capabilities for critical USMC missions,” said Mike Atwood, Vice President of Advanced Programs for GA-ASI. “Our FQ-42, combined with our proven autonomy architecture and integration expertise, positions us to rapidly deliver an affordable CCA solution that enhances the Marine Air-Ground Task Force’s operational effectiveness in contested environments.”

GA-ASI was selected by the U.S. Air Force in April 2024 to build production-representative flight test articles for the CCA program. The YFQ-42A successfully conducted its maiden flight in August 2025, validating a “genus/species” concept for rapid, modular, and low-cost uncrewed fighter aircraft development. This approach enables a common core aircraft design that can be rapidly adapted for different mission sets and service requirements.

The YFQ-42A is a purpose-built CCA platform developed as part of GA-ASI’s ongoing investment in next-generation autonomous combat aircraft. The aircraft’s modular design enables rapid integration of mission systems. GA-ASI’s autonomy architecture, demonstrated through multiple live flight tests, provides the foundation for human-machine teaming in complex combat scenarios.

Marine Corps Passes Fiscal 2025 Financial Audit

From Communication Directorate, Headquarters Marine Corps, Feb.9, 2026

HEADQUARTERS, MARINE CORPS – For the third year in a row, independent auditors verified that the Marine Corps' financial records are materially accurate, complete, and compliant with federal regulations and issued an unmodified opinion for Fiscal Year 2025.

Three is a pattern of accountability. This repeat achievement reinforces the service's reputation for accountability, discipline, and leadership. The first and only service to achieve a clean, unmodified audit opinion, the Marine Corps continues to lead department-wide efforts toward effective financial management and delivering accountability to the American taxpayer.

The findings produced by the audit help the service to more efficiently and accurately plan, program, budget, and spend funds appropriated by Congress.

The Marine Corps' audit process enabled accurate global tracking and reporting of financial transactions, inventory of facilities, equipment and assets, and accounting for taxpayer dollars spent during the last fiscal year. The auditors also tested the Marines Corps' network, key business systems, and internal controls.

"Passing our third consecutive audit is a direct reflection of who we are as Marines," said Gen. Eric M. Smith, Commandant of the Marine Corps. "Discipline, accountability, and stewardship are not administrative tasks; they are part of our warfighting culture. When the American people entrust us with their tax dollars, we owe them careful judgment and integrity in how those dollars are spent. Receiving our third consecutive clean audit opinion affirms that Marines take that responsibility seriously at every level, in every unit. I am beyond proud of the work by our Marines, Sailors, and civilians that made this possible."

Since becoming the first service to pass an annual financial audit, the Marine Corps took additional steps to stabilize its new accounting system and procedures. Independent public accountants contracted by the Department of War Inspector General audited all records. Financial management personnel also gained more hands-on experience, which set conditions for a smoother audit this year.

“With each additional audit year under our belts, we get smarter and adapt, finding new and better ways to get the job done,” said LtGen. James Adams III, Deputy Commandant for Programs and Resources. “But to be clear, the hurdle we pass is no less significant. A financial statement audit is a year-round effort that tests every aspect of how we manage money for the Marine Corps. The sustained focus of our team on doing the job right over time is impressive.”

The auditor’s final report, enclosed in the Marine Corps’ Fiscal Year 2025 Agency Financial Report, highlights seven areas for the Marine Corps to improve upon, referred to as material weaknesses.

The Marine Corps will continue to eliminate these weaknesses through systems improvement and internal controls. While doing this, the Corps will still prioritize the accurate counting and management of its global assets, a challenging task given the vast scope of its operations. By repeating and refining this process, the Corps aims to develop a more fluid and efficient enterprise resource planning system, ultimately positioning itself for long-term mission success and accountability.

The Agency Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2025 is available at: https://www.pandr.marines.mil/

Israel MOD Signs $130M Deal with Elbit Systems to

Integrate Israeli Systems on CH-53Ks

Release From Elbit Systems

As part of the preparations for receiving the CH-53K “Pereh” helicopters, the Defense Procurement Directorate (DPD) within the Israel Ministry of Defense (IMOD) has signed a deal with Elbit Systems to integrate advanced Israeli technologies, including command and control, avionics, and electronic warfare systems, and the advanced anti-missile DIRCM system, on the 12 new helicopters expected to replace the IDF’s aging “Yas’ur” helicopters. The deal, led by the Deputy Director of the DPD for Air and Sea Procurement, is valued at

approximately $130 million (over NIS 400 million).

The CH-53K helicopters were purchased through a Foreign Military Sales (FMS) agreement signed several years ago between the IMOD and the U.S. government. The helicopters are manufactured by Lockheed Martin-Sikorsky and are currently in the assembly process at the main production facility in Connecticut.

Upon completion of assembly, the helicopters are expected to move to a dedicated installation and production line established for adapting the American-configuration helicopters to Israeli systems tailored to the operational requirements defined by the Israeli Air Force (IAF). The integration of Israeli systems is expected to enhance the cockpit environment, enable flight in challenging conditions, and support the identification of safe landing zones and obstacles.

Defense Minister Israel Katz: "This deal marks a major milestone in strengthening the IDF and securing the Israeli Air Force's operational edge for years ahead. Integrating cutting-edge Israeli systems into the world's most advanced heavy-lift helicopter ensures these platforms are fully adapted to Israel's unique combat requirements. We remain committed to advancing domestic 'blue-and-white' defense production and incorporating Israeli industries into strategic programs, ensuring production independence, supply continuity, and operational superiority for our forces."

IMOD Director General Maj. Gen. (Res.) Amir Baram: "The CH-53K helicopters are a key part of the multi-year procurement program the Ministry is pursuing alongside the IDF for fighter squadrons, helicopters, tankers, and various armaments that will define the IDF's force structure for the coming decade and beyond. Integrating Israeli technologies into the world's most advanced heavy-lift helicopter demonstrates the technological edge of Israel's defense industries and the

significant potential of incorporating Israeli systems into cutting-edge aircraft platforms.”

Elbit Systems President and CEO, Bezhalel (Butzi) Machlis: “We are honored to take part in the flagship project to upgrade the helicopter fleet and to support the complex needs of the Air Force, through Elbit’s most advanced systems, which will be integrated into the new CH-53K helicopters. These systems, representing the forefront of Elbit’s proven technology, are tailored to the Air Force’s requirements and provide an optimal advanced technological envelope for mission execution and for ensuring pilot safety.”

Marines Establish Refueling Point in Indo-Pacific

Feb. 6, 2026 | By Marine Corps Lance Cpl. David Getz , 1st Marine Aircraft Wing,

Marines assigned to Marine Wing Support Squadron 171 and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232 traveled to Tinian, one of the Northern Mariana Islands, to establish and operate a forward arming and refueling point during an aviation training relocation program aimed at developing expeditionary aviation capabilities and ensuring security throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

“We are out here training to show we can set up a FARP

anywhere quickly and provide support wherever the fight is happening," said Marine Corps Sgt. Kuyler Brown, an expeditionary fuels technician assigned to the support squadron.

The FARP was used to conduct simulated real-world scenarios that gave Marines on the ground experience operating a live FARP and pilots the ability to operate away from their main operating base while receiving continuous support.

"Having a FARP allows us to stay in the fight," Brown said. "It cuts down on flight time, keeps our jets in the air longer and shows we can set up anywhere and operate."

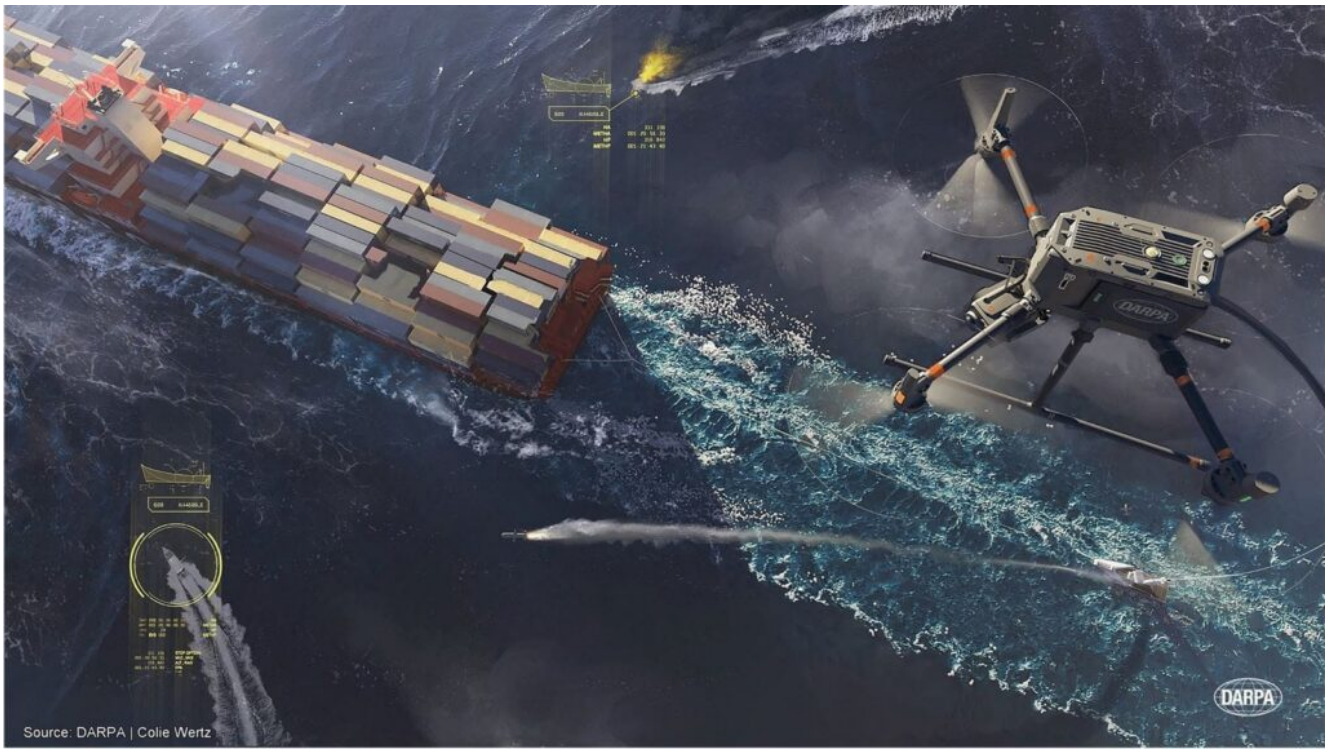
Tinian is located near Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, which provides the ability to rapidly refuel and support aircraft, making it a valuable training area for aviation training relocation operations and projecting power throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Conducting training from island locations like Tinian allows Marines to gain real-world experience practicing FARP assembly, disassembly and sustained aviation operations in austere environments – a key aspect of the expeditionary execution of a FARP.

"This kind of training builds the Marines' confidence not only in their own capabilities but in each other," Brown said. "Our Marines know how to do their jobs, and exercises like this prove we can make it happen."

The successful setup and operation of the FARP at Tinian demonstrated Marine Wing Support Squadron 171's ability to deploy and support aviation operations in austere environments. Training events like this give Marines the chance to develop their skills and remain ready to support future operations focused on ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

RTX’s Raytheon Selected by DARPA to Develop Advanced Maritime Defense Technologies



Release From RTX

New capability will protect vulnerable vessels from threats at sea

PORTSMOUTH, R.I., (February 2, 2026) – Raytheon, an RTX (NYSE: RTX) business, has been selected by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to develop an advanced sensing and targeting system that will help defend vulnerable commercial shipping and naval logistics vessels against emerging threats such as unmanned surface vehicles (USVs).

Under the contract, Raytheon’s Advanced Technology team will design, build, and demonstrate a system that consists of

Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR) sensors, advanced detection software, and robust command and control capabilities to enhance situational awareness and threat response.

The system, which is being developed for DARPA's Pulling Guard program, will deploy the sensors via a tethered drone connected to a semi-autonomous unmanned platform that is towed by commercial and naval logistics vessels. The sensors will provide real-time target tracking data to remote operators, enabling them to make rapid, informed engagement decisions.

Phase one of the program will focus on simulated engagements to evaluate system performance and operator workflows. In phase two, the system will transition to integrating operational launchers and effectors for live operations.

"Through this development, we are advancing critical security technologies for commercial shipping in regions like the Red Sea," said Colin Whelan, president of Advanced Technology at Raytheon. "By integrating our proven expertise in command and control, high-performance sensing, and effectors, we will deliver a scalable, cost-effective solution that minimizes risks to both cargo and naval assets."

Beyond its primary focus of vulnerable ship protection, the technology Raytheon is developing has the potential to deliver broader capabilities across a wide range of naval and security operations, including automated overwatch for medium and large USVs and manned combatants operating in multiple theaters.

Marine Corps fast-tracks

contract for new Precision Attack Strike Missile

The Navy’s Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (HX) 21 launch a Long Range Attack Missile (LRAM) from an AH-1Z off coast of Virginia in late 2025. This demonstration paved the way for the Precision Attack Strike Munitions program (PASM), bringing cost-effective, long-range precision strikes to the USMC AH-1Z missions. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)
From Naval Air Systems Command, Jan 30, 2026

NAS PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Department of Navy announced the $86.2 million contract award of the Precision Attack Strike Munition to L3Harris Technologies Jan 30, a critical component of the Marine Corps’ vision for enhancing the lethality and survivability of its rotary-wing assets.

PASM will provide the Marine Corps with a cost-effective, longer-range, precision weapon that can deliver diverse effects (kinetic or non–kinetic) from AH-1Z aircraft in land

and sea-based environments.

Over the past several years, the Marine Corps conducted a Joint Capability Technology Demonstration (JCTD) for the Long-Range Attack Munition (LRAM). The tests successfully proved the technology's capability for a low-altitude, rotary-wing aircraft to perform offensive anti-surface warfare and maritime strikes. These demonstrations informed the department's decision to award the contract.

"We are proud to partner with L3Harris Technologies to deliver a system that will provide a decisive advantage to Marine Corps pilots and support their missions worldwide," said Rear Adm. Tony Rossi, who oversees the Program Executive Office for Unmanned Aviation and Strike Weapons (PEO (U&W)).

PEO (U&W)'s Direct and Time Sensitive Strike Weapons program office (PMA-242) awarded the contract under an Other Transaction Agreement/Authority (OTA) – a contract vehicle used by the government to streamline research and development and prototype development.

"The use of an OTA contract is a key part of this strategy, designed to rapidly prototype and field a capability that's essential for operations in contested environments and against advanced adversaries," said. Capt. Lindsey Buzzell, PMA-242 program manager.

Under the contract, L3Harris Technologies will deliver all units, manuals, training, support equipment, and test equipment for AH-1Z by end of fiscal year 2027.

PMA-242 is the Direct and Time Sensitive program office for the Navy and Marine Corps.

HII Hosts U.S. Marine Corps Leaders at Ingalls Shipbuilding

PASCAGOULA, Miss., Feb. 03, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) — HII (NYSE: HII) hosted U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Bradford Gering, assistant commandant, and fellow U.S. Marine Corps officers at the company's Ingalls Shipbuilding division Thursday. The Marines met with Ingalls leadership and toured the shipyard, including stops at two of the five amphibious warships currently under construction, *Bougainville* (LHA 8) and *Harrisburg* (LPD 30).

"We are honored to host Marine Corps leadership and showcase the critical role our Ingalls shipbuilders play in delivering the amphibious ships that support Navy and Marine Corps missions worldwide," said Brian Blanchette, Ingalls Shipbuilding president. "The amphibious ship program remains a top priority for our team, and we value the opportunity to demonstrate the skill and dedication our shipbuilders bring to every ship we build."

Ingalls has a long-standing history of building amphibious warships, and the collaboration between Ingalls Shipbuilding, the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps was on full display during the visit.

Commenting on the tour, Gering highlighted the importance of amphibious warships.

“The Navy and Marine Corps team relies on these ships for a broad range of missions from peacekeeping and deterrence to combat operations and humanitarian assistance,” Gering said. “Programs like the LHA and LPD are vital to enabling Marine Corps readiness and ensuring our ability to respond quickly to emerging challenges.”

Ingalls currently has two LHAs under construction including *Bougainville* (LHA 8) and *Fallujah* (LHA 9) and three Flight II LPDs under construction including *Harrisburg* (LPD 30), *Pittsburgh* (LPD 31) and *Philadelphia* (LPD 32). Additionally, in September 2024, the Navy awarded Ingalls a contract for the construction of three *San Antonio*-class amphibious transport dock ships (LPD 33, LPD 34 and LPD 35) and a contract modification for the fifth *America*-class amphibious assault ship, *Helmand Province* (LHA 10).

CTF 68 Builds Maritime Advantage with NATO Allies During Exercise Freezing

Winds 2025

UPINNIEMI, Finland (Nov. 25, 2025) U.S. Navy explosive ordnance disposal technicians from Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile 8, Commander Task Group 68.1, and Finnish Navy sailors conduct a live-fire exercise as a part of Freezing Winds 25 in Upinniemi, Finland, Nov. 25, 2025. (U.S. Navy Photo by MC2 Juan J. Ruiz-Lazcano)

By Commander, Task Force 68 Public Affairs

BALTIC SEA – U.S. Navy expeditionary forces assigned to Commander, Naval Expeditionary Combat Forces Europe-Africa/Commander, Task Force 68 (CTF 68) recently concluded operations in support of Exercise Freezing Winds 2025, a Finnish-led multinational training event designed to bolster collective readiness, interoperability, and security across the North Baltic Sea.

Operating in concert with NATO Allies and U.S. Marines from Marine Rotational Force – Europe, CTF 68 contributed command

and control, explosive ordnance disposal, and maritime logistics support across multiple domains. The exercise served as a proving ground for joint force operations in cold-weather environments and underscored the U.S. Navy's commitment to enhancing allied maritime security throughout the Baltic region.

"Operating alongside our NATO Allies and U.S. Marines in the challenging conditions of the Baltic Sea sharpens our readiness and reinforces our shared commitment to collective defense," said Capt. Jeremy Wheat, commodore of Task Force 68. "This exercise strengthens our ability to respond as a unified force, no matter the environment or mission."

A key focus during Freezing Winds was improving freedom of movement in contested environments, which was made possible in part by the efforts of explosive ordnance disposal technicians from Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit (EODMU) 8, assigned to Task Group 68.1. Their role involved simulated route clearance, underwater searches, and demolition operations near critical infrastructure and maritime logistics nodes. All of which were part of scenarios designed to test real-world response to sea mines and unexploded ordnance in congested littorals.

"Our role during Freezing Winds was to ensure freedom of movement by mitigating explosive threats along resupply corridors and maritime infrastructure, especially in areas affected by simulated mining and unexploded ordnance," said Lt. Luke Robertson, platoon officer-in-charge from TG 68.1. "Training with NATO Allies in these conditions enhances our ability to operate forward and respond to real-world threats in complex environments."

To support these clearance efforts and maintain the tempo of operations, logistics teams from Navy Cargo Handling Battalion (NCHB) 5, assigned to Task Group 68.5, provided the connective tissue needed to move fuel, cargo, and personnel across the

battlespace. Supporting the combined force, TG 68.5 conducted cargo handling, aerial port coordination, and fuel delivery under freezing conditions proving the battalion’s capacity to sustain forward-deployed operations in the High North.

“Our mission was to provide combat service support by moving fuel, cargo, and munitions anywhere they’re needed from high-latitude airfields to expeditionary seaports,” said Lt. Michael Flickinger, TG 68.5 site officer-in-charge. “The environment was challenging, but working side-by-side with Finnish and U.S. Marine logistics teams allowed us to validate scalable, mobile support concepts.”

Exercise Freezing Winds 2025 also contributed to NATO’s broader effort to boost defense readiness across the Baltic Sea, a vital region for global commerce and energy transit. The inclusion of expeditionary units from CTF 68 added a crucial logistics and access-focused dimension to high-end naval and amphibious training.

“The ability of our expeditionary units to integrate into Allied operations, as demonstrated in Freezing Winds, is what makes CTF 68 so unique,” Wheat added. “We bring scalable, responsive capability that extends the reach and impact of the entire naval force.”

Wheat said that in an era marked by renewed focus on strategic deterrence in the High North, exercises like Freezing Winds enabled CTF 68 to contribute directly to integrated defense posture and the Alliance’s maritime advantage.

Exercise Freezing Winds 2025 demonstrated the value of persistent, forward-deployed presence and reinforced the importance of logistics, access, and integration as enablers of joint and allied maritime advantage. “Through exercises like Freezing Winds, CTF 68 continues to maintain a persistent, forward-deployed presence delivering scalable expeditionary capabilities that advance Alliance readiness and

regional stability," said Wheat.

Commander, Task Force 68 commands all Navy Expeditionary Combat Forces in Europe and Africa and provides critical capabilities including logistics, explosive ordnance disposal, maritime engineering, port operations, and expeditionary security in support of U.S. 6th Fleet and NATO objectives.

Secretary of War Announces General Officer Nominations

From the Department of War, Jan. 20, 2026

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced Jan. 20 that the president has made the following nominations:

Marine Corps Lt. Gen. James H. Adams III for reappointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as director, Defense Intelligence Agency, Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, Washington, D.C. Adams is currently serving as deputy commandant for Programs and Resources, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Melvin G. Carter for reappointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as director's advisor for Military Affairs, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Washington, D.C. Carter is currently serving as deputy commandant for Information, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Robert C. Fulford for reappointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as commanding general, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Fulford is currently serving as deputy commander, U.S. European Command, Stuttgart, Germany.

Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Benjamin T. Watson for reappointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as commanding general, III Marine Expeditionary Force and commander, Marine Forces Japan, Okinawa, Japan. Watson is currently serving as deputy commandant, Training and Education, and commanding general, Training and Education Command, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Calvert L. Worth Jr. for reappointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Command/commanding general, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic/commander, Marine Forces North, Norfolk, Virginia. Worth is currently serving as commanding general, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Joseph A. Matos III for appointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as deputy commandant for Information, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Matos is currently serving as commander, Marine Forces Cyberspace Command; commander, Marine Forces Space Command; commander, Joint Force Headquarters-Cyber; commander, Marine Corps Information Command, Fort Meade, Maryland.

Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Andrew M. Niebel, for appointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as deputy commandant for Installations and Logistics, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Niebel is currently serving as director, Logistics Division, Installations and Logistics, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.