

First Marine Corps F-35C Squadron One Step Closer to Deployment



Capt. Tommy Beau Locke flies the first F-35C aircraft attached to the Black Knights of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 314 over Naval Air Station Lemoore with an F/A-18A assigned to VMFA-314 flown by Lt. Col. Cedar Hinton. U.S. Navy/Lt. Cmdr. Darin Russell

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps' first squadron to operate the F-35C Lightning II strike fighter has achieved certification as "safe for flight," a major milestone toward eventual combat readiness and deployment.

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314), based at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California, recently completed five months of transition as it retired its F/A-18C Hornet strike fighters and trained in the carrier-capable F-35C with the Navy's F-35C fleet replacement squadron, Strike Fighter Squadron 125 (VFA-125), at Naval Air Station Lemoore, California. The certification was achieved on March 20, the III Marine Aircraft Wing said in a release.

The certification process "ensures the squadron is manned with qualified personnel to implement maintenance and safety programs in support of fleet operations. All transitioning squadrons are required to complete this certification prior to independently conducting flight operations," the release said.

"The certification process encompasses areas such as equipment, personnel and programs. Requirements include the installation and operation of management information systems and their accompanying support networks. There is also a requirement for operational F-35C squadrons to maintain robust

maintenance programs and complete various inspections ranging from conventional weapons technical proficiencies to safety. Squadron personnel complete a transition curriculum and maintain specific competencies in accordance with Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures and Standardization guidelines.”

VMFA-314 is in line to deploy on an aircraft carrier in 2022, according to the 2019 Marine Corps Aviation Plan, as one of four strike fighter squadrons of a carrier air wing. Under the TACAIR Integration Plan, the Marine Corps contributes some VMFA squadrons to carrier air wings. Currently, one F/A-18C-equipped squadron, VMFA-323, is assigned to Carrier Air Wing 17 and will make the last F/A-18C carrier deployment. VMFA(AW)-225 will be the next Marine Corps squadron to make the transition to the F-35C.