

Marine Corps Harrier Squadron Deactivates; to Fly Another Day in F-35Cs



U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Keith Bucklew, commanding officer of Marine Attack Squadron 311, taxis down the flightline in an AV-8B Harrier II assigned to VMA-311, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, during his last flight at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., Oct. 14, 2020. U.S. Marine Corps / Lance Cpl. Julian Elliott-Drouin

ARLINGTON, VA. — An Oct. 15 ceremony marked the deactivation of Marine Attack Squadron 311 (VMA-311), an AV-8B Harrier II squadron at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma, Arizona, as the squadron shifted some assets to merge with sister squadron VMA-214.

VMA-311 will be re-activated in early 2022 as Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 311 (VMFA-311) at MCAS Miramar, California, to fly the F-35C Lightning II strike fighter, the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing said in an Oct. 16 release.

VMA-311 “became the first Marine squadron to employ the AV-8B Harrier in combat during Operation Desert Shield,” the release said. “VMA-311’s Harriers were the first to fly combat missions in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom and participated in the first combat sortie of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.”

“The reputable Tomcats have an exceptional level of esprit de corps representing 78 years of superior performance,” said Sgt. Maj. Colin Barry, VMA-311 sergeant major, in the release. “The Tomcats imbued a level of morale within each other that was unmatched, but I have no doubt the newly adopted VMA-214 Black Sheep identity will be embraced, and they will continue performing remarkably.”

The deactivation leaves VMA-214 as the only Harrier squadron left in Yuma-based Marine Aircraft Group 13. Three other Harrier attack squadrons – VMA-223, VMA-231 and VMA-542 – are based at MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina, along with a replacement training squadron, VMAT-203.

VMA-214 also will make the transition to the Lightning II, in this case the F-35B short takeoff/vertical landing version.