

Marine Corps Retires its Last AH-1W Super Cobra Helicopters

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An AH-1W Super Cobra with Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 lands after a final flight before the aircraft are deactivated. The aircraft were augmented to the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit and returned to HMLA-167 to be deactivated. U.S. Marine Corps / Lance Cpl. Gavin T. Umboh

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps has officially retired the Bell AH-1W “Super Cobra” from their ranks after 34 years of dependable service, Bell Textron, the helicopter’s builder, said in an Oct. 19 release.

The last detachment of AH-1Ws to complete a deployment returned earlier this year with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit. The detachment, temporarily assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 365 (Reinforced), was part of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 (HMLA-167), based at Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina.

The last AH-1W sortie was flown on Oct. 14 by HMLA-773 Detachment A at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans, Louisiana.

“Originally designated as the AH-1T+, the Super Cobra first flew on November 16, 1983 at Bell’s Flight Research Center in Arlington, Texas,” the release said. “Bell delivered the first AH-1Ws to the Marines on March 27, 1986 and delivered the final aircraft in 1999, for a domestic fleet of 179 attack helicopters. Through August 2020, the Marine Corps flew the Super Cobra for 933,614 hours.”

The AH-1W served in numerous combat actions, including Operation Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and in operations in Libya.

“The AH-1W Super Cobra has served admirably and leaves a remarkable legacy of on-time, on-target attack helicopter support for our Marines,” said Col. David Walsh, the program manager for Light/Attack Helicopter Programs (PMA-276), in the release. “Although the AH-1W chapter is closing, the AH-1Z Viper stands ready with even greater capability to support our Marines for years to come.”

“We are tremendously proud of the capabilities the AH-1W has brought to the United States Marines for the past 34 years,” said Michael Deslatte, H-1 Bell program manager. “The Super Cobra’s tremendous legacy is a testament to the excellence and dedication the men and women at Bell put into these platforms for generations and we look forward to continuing that legacy for years to come.”

All HMLA squadrons are now equipped with the four-bladed AH-1Z Viper.