

Marine F-35B Squadron Completes Historic Deployment on HMS Queen Elizabeth



U.S. Marines with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211 conduct pre-flight checks on an F-35B Lightning II on the flight deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth in the Mediterranean Sea on Nov. 24. VMFA-211 aircraft landed at Naval Station Rota as the first stop on their redeployment to Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / 1st Lt. Zachary Bodner*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps F-35B squadron that deployed on board the U.K. Royal Navy aircraft carrier departed the ship last week for Naval Station Rota, Spain, from which the squadron would return to its home base of Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona.

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 211 (VMFA-211) – known as the Wake Island Avengers – completed a six-month deployment on board HMS Queen Elizabeth to the Western Pacific, Indian

Ocean, and Mediterranean Sea as a unit of the U.K. Carrier Strike Group.

According to a spokesperson of the HMS Queen Elizabeth, VMFA-211 and its Royal Air Force/Royal Navy counterpart, the Dambusters of 617 Squadron, flew 1,278 sorties, "clocking up more than 2,200 hours in skies around the globe. They also carried out 44 missions in support of the U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve – conducting air strikes against Daesh [Islamic State]."

"The 10 F-35B of VMFA-211 undertook their final launch from HMS Queen Elizabeth bringing to a close 16 months of integration with the United Kingdom Carrier Strike Group," said Capt. James Blackmore, Royal Navy Air Wing and Strike Warfare Commander. "Embarked for the whole of CSG21, forging ever-greater links between the U.K. and the U.S., VMFA-211 and the 200-plus Marines have been an integral part of the inaugural deployment. Operating with a range of allies, especially the U.S., provides an invaluable opportunity to gain further experience of the highly capable Lightning F-35B with Merlin and Wildcat helicopters from the Queen Elizabeth-class carriers. I wish the Wake Island Avengers well with their future operations."

"The CSG21 deployment has seen VMFA-211, a U.S. Marine Corps F-35B squadron, integrated throughout," said Commodore Steve Moorhouse, commander, U.K. Carrier Strike Group. "It has been the most tangible demonstration of the U.K. and U.S. special relationship and our united efforts to ensure stability, security and freedom of the seas. As the U.K. Carrier Strike Group says farewell to our Marine Corps colleagues, I wish to thank them for their commitment, loyalty, professionalism and great humor. The achievements on this deployment have been ground-breaking and raised the bar in terms of integration. As the saying goes; if you want to go fast, go alone but if you want to go strong then go together. Semper fidelis."