

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 Returns from Historic Deployment with F-35B



U.S. Marine Corps pilots with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542, Marine Aircraft Group 14, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, taxi F-35B Lightning II aircraft at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, Oct. 8, 2025. Marines with VMFA-542 returned to MCAS Cherry Point following a deployment in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Landon Lingle)

Story by [Master Sgt. Shakima Deprince](#), [U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command](#)

MacDill AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 (VMFA-542), operating the F-35B Lightning II stealth fighter, has successfully returned from a historic five-month

deployment to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, marking a major milestone in Marine Corps aviation and joint force integration.

During the deployment, VMFA-542 made a significant operational and strategic impact in the CENTCOM AOR. The squadron conducted Close Air Support, Armed Overwatch, and Defensive Counter-Air missions in support of Marine, Navy, Army, coalition, and partner nation forces. They advanced F-35 tactics, techniques, and procedures while demonstrating the aircraft's flexibility in real-world operations.

The unit flew more than 1,099 combat sorties and accumulated over 4,736 mishap-free flight hours, providing essential support to CENTCOM's integrated air operations. VMFA-542 not only enhanced deterrence, supported regional maritime security, and deepened interoperability through combined training with allied and partner air forces, but also led the way in USMC F-35 flight hours, maintaining a high Aircraft Mission Capable readiness rate, setting the standard for aviation units across the fleet.

"VMFA-542's historic deployment has set new benchmarks for Marine Corps aviation, demonstrating that a forward deployed F-35B squadron can deliver unmatched combat power and readiness while seamlessly integrating with Joint Forces during a major regional crisis," said LtCol Carlo F. Bonci, Executive Officer, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542.

As part of CENTCOM's Air Component Ninth Air Force (Air Forces Central), VMFA-542 integrated into coalition air and defense operations. The addition of the F-35B Lightning II brought a major upgrade in tactical flexibility, intelligence gathering, and precision strike capabilities.

The F-35B is a fifth-generation stealth fighter uniquely capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings, providing the

Marine Corps with operational agility across both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions.

This deployment underscores the Marine Corps' commitment to maintaining readiness and effectiveness in complex environments while reinforcing partnerships with regional allies. VMFA-542 set a new standard for aviation units across the fleet, leaving a tangible impact on the CENTCOM mission recognized by joint and coalition commanders alike.