

VMA-223 celebrates sundown as Marine Corps' final Harrier squadron



U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. John B. Cumbie, left, a native of Texas and the commanding officer of Marine Attack Squadron (VMA) 223, Marine Aircraft Group 14, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing and Cpl. Myles J. Howard a native of Georgia, a fixed-wing aircraft mechanic with VMA-223, stand at attention in front of an AV-8B Harrier II at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, June 3, 2026. The “sundown” of the AV-8B Harrier II, an iconic aircraft that has supported joint and Marine Corps operations for over 40 years, also represents the dawn of a new era; it paves the way for 2nd MAW’s full transition to the F-35B and C Lightning II. VMA-223 is the U.S. Marine Corps’ last operational Harrier squadron. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Donovan Pimentel)

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MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – Marine Attack Squadron (VMA) 223, known as “the Bulldogs”, celebrated the conclusion of nearly 40 years of operational history with the AV-8B Harrier II during a public ceremony at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, Wednesday. The ceremony marked an important moment in time for VMA-223 and also signaled the end of an era for Marine Corps aviation as the service continues its transition to an all-5th generation tactical aircraft fleet.

“The Bulldogs are extremely proud to conduct the final Harrier operations for the U.S. Marine Corps”, said Lt. Col. John B. Cumbie, commanding officer of VMA-223. “As a platform that has continuously forward deployed across the globe, the Harrier will be remembered for its distinguished combat legacy, legendary Vertical/Short Take Off and Landing (V/STOL) capability, and the Marines and Sailors that made the community special.”

Wednesday’s ceremony was attended by over 5,000 people. Attendees included senior Marine Corps leaders, state and local officials, active-duty service members, local community members, family and friends of VMA-223, and veterans with ties to the Harrier community. The ceremony included a five-aircraft formation flight and vertical landing that showcased the Harrier’s unique V/STOL capability.

The Harrier platform has maintained a proud and storied legacy throughout its 55 years of service with the U.S. Marine Corps. In 1971, the Marine Corps accepted the first AV-8A into its inventory. In 1985, VMA-331, stationed aboard Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina, became the Marine Corps’ first operational AV-8B squadron. VMA-223 began flying the AV-8B in early 1987. Since its inception with the Marine Corps, the Harrier has been instrumental in numerous combat operations, including Operations Desert Shield and Desert

Storm, Operation Allied Force, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Odyssey Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and operations during the Red Sea crisis. Time and again, the Harrier distinguished itself as a lethal, capable and versatile tactical air platform.

Colloquially known as a "jump jet" for its ability to take off and land within short distances, the AV-8B is a V/STOL aircraft designed to support the Marine Air Ground Task Force commander by destroying surface targets and escorting friendly aircraft. The AV-8B's lethality and V/STOL capability made it uniquely suited for deployments in support of Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs). VMA-223's final detachment of Harriers to support a MEU returned to Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point last month after supporting operations with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit in the Caribbean.

In fiscal year 2028 VMA-223 is scheduled to reactivate as Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA)-223 and will begin flying the F-35B Lightning II. VMA-223 is the last Marine Corps squadron to operate the Harrier.