VMFA-224 Redesignates as Marine Corps’ Newest F-35B Squadron



U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Steven E. Buckom, from North Carolina, command senior enlisted leader, Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA(AW)) 224, passes the Marine Corps colors to Lt. Col. Jarrod Allen, from California, the outgoing commanding officer of VMFA(AW)-224, during a squadron redesignation and change of command ceremony at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina, June 26, 2025. The ceremony represented the squadron’s transition from an all-weather F/A-18D Hornet squadron to an F-35B Lightning II squadron and signified the transfer of responsibility, authority, and accountability from Allen to Lt. Col John P. Stuart. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Gavin K. Kulczewski)

From Communication Strategy and Operations Office, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

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MARINE CORPS AIR STATION BEAUFORT, S.C. – Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA(AW)) 224 redesignated to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 224 during a change of command and redesignation ceremony at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina, on Thursday, June 26.

The event marked the squadron's historic transition from operating the F/A-18D Hornet to becoming an F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter squadron, concluding more than 32 years as a Hornet squadron and as a Marine all-weather fighter attack squadron.

In addition to the redesignation, the ceremony also served as a change of command, representing a transfer of responsibility, authority, and accountability from Lt. Col. Jarrod Allen, the former commanding officer, VMFA(AW)-224, to Lt. Col. John Stuart, the current commanding officer of VMFA-224.

"For over 30 years, the Fightin' Bengals have superbly executed the mission of a Marine all-weather fighter attack squadron," said Allen. "As the Bengals redesignate, it ends an era of the All-Weather designation that began with the Night Fighter designation in 1943. I could not be prouder of the Marines and Sailors who upheld the high standards of excellence during the final days of this chapter."

With origins dating back to 1942, the "Bengals," or "Fightin' Bengals," have a storied legacy in Marine Corps aviation. The squadron supported operations in World War II, the Vietnam War, Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, and the Global War on Terror. Throughout its history, the squadron consistently adapted to emerging aviation technologies to meet evolving modernization demands, including numerous hardware and software upgrades to the F/A-18 Hornet. After conducting its final F/A-18 flight on April 28, 2025, the Bengals now

look ahead as they transition to the F-35B.

The F-35 is a fifth-generation fighter jet with advanced stealth, agility and maneuverability, sensor and information fusion, and provides the pilot with real-time access to battlespace information. It is designed to meet an advanced threat while improving lethality, survivability, and supportability. The F-35B Lightning II is the short-takeoff and vertical-landing (STOVL) F-35 variant. This capability allows the aircraft to operate from amphibious assault ships and expeditionary airstrips less than 2,000 feet long.

Stuart also reflected on the squadron's legacy.

"The newly unfurled battle colors of VMFA-224 are adorned with streamers that represent the unit's history, accomplishments, and the legacy left by those who came before," said Stuart. "As the squadron transitions into the fifth generation of fighter aircraft with the F-35B, that legacy will be an omnipresent reminder of why we must constantly prepare for whatever comes next."

As the Marine Corps' newest F-35B squadron, VMFA-224 continues to prepare its personnel, equipment, and procedures for F-35 operations. The squadron expects to receive its first F-35B in late 2025 and is working towards receiving its Safe for Flight certification.

"The next thing for the Fightin' Bengals is to build upon the rock-solid foundation we've inherited and produce a stealth fighter squadron unmatched in tactical excellence, maintenance efficiency, quality, and Marine Corps ethos," said Stuart. "Rest assured, when our nation calls upon the Bengals to do its bidding, the adversaries of our country and her allies will understand what it means to 'Fear the Ambush.'"

VMFA-224 is a subordinate unit of 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, the aviation combat element of II Marine Expeditionary Force.

For photos of the ceremony, please visit:

https://www.dvidshub.net/image/9134988/vmfa-224-change-command-and-redesignation-ceremony