VX-31 conducts its final AV-8B Harrier II Flight



From Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, Sept. 30, 2025

CHINA LAKE, Calif. – Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 31, the Dust Devils, concluded the AV-8B Harrier's service with a sundown ceremony Sept. 23, when the squadron flew the jet for the final time and shut it down on the China Lake flight line.

The final sortie, flown by Jim “Jimbo” Coppersmith, VX-31 technical director, brought veterans, Sailors, Marines, government civilians, industry partners and family members to the flight line to watch a traditional water salute and to say goodbye to a platform that served the fleet for more than four decades.

U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Timothy “Little Buddy” Burchett, VX-31 commanding officer, described the Harrier as one of the most challenging and rewarding aircraft to fly.

“It’s the most fun airplane I’ve ever flown,” said Burchett. “There are no computers. It’s cables, pulleys and skill that keep that thing in the air.”

He called the Harrier “a uniquely Marine Corps aircraft” and praised the China Lake test team for keeping the program safe and mission capable to the finish.

“We did not coast into the finish line. It was a triumphant finish for the team partnership,” Burchett said.

Coppersmith highlighted the squadron’s role in strengthening the aircraft’s combat effectiveness and safety record through decades of testing at China Lake.

“It’s the most successful attack aircraft in Marine Corps history. No doubt about it,” he said. “We lost many great Marines along the way. Those treatments and those material fixes, the procedures we wrote, the engineering changes we made, saved lives and limbs.”

Burchett pointed to VX-31’s testing culture as a model for the entire community.

“You truly were the gold standard of testing,” he said.

Coppersmith closed his remarks by reflecting on the Harrier’s history at China Lake and the teamwork that kept it flying until the end.

“That jet right there flew its very first flight off the production line 33 years ago,” he said. “Today we completed AV-8B flight operations. We shut it down full mission capable, and it flew flawlessly. It’s a testament to what we’ve done to this aircraft as a team.”