

FRCE Delivers Final AV-8 Harrier to Fleet



Fleet Readiness Center East (FRCE) celebrated its final AV-8B Harrier maintenance event with an informal celebration in the facility's AV-8B hangar Sept. 20. FRCE delivered the completed aircraft to Marine Attack Squadron 223 onboard Marine Air Station Cherry Point Sept. 26.

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MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – Fleet Readiness Center East (FRCE) marked the end of an era with the completion of its final AV-8B Harrier maintenance event, delivering the aircraft to Marine Attack Squadron 223 onboard Marine Air Station Cherry Point Sept. 26.

FRCE celebrated the platform's depot maintenance finale with an informal ceremony Sept. 20 in the command's AV-8 hangar. FRCE Commanding Officer Capt. Randy Berti and leaders from the AV-8B Weapon Systems Program Office (PMA-257) recognized members of the depot's Harrier team, both past and present, for their efforts in supporting the legendary aircraft throughout the years.

Berti said the command's AV-8B team has been instrumental in ensuring readiness within the Harrier community.

"It's an honor to lead a facility with such a remarkable legacy," said Berti. "For five decades, FRC East has been a cornerstone in supporting the Harrier program for both the Marine Corps and our nation's international allies. Our AV-8 platform's success is directly attributed to the hard work and dedication of multiple generations of FRC East employees. I am proud of all this team has accomplished throughout the years and I look forward to what's next."

FRCE has supported the Harrier since 1973, beginning with its assignment of the AV-8A Harrier and F402 engine workload. With the platform sundowning as the Marine Corps replaces it with the F-35 Lightning II, the depot's Harrier program will continue its transition to supporting other weapons platforms, including the F-35.

Many of the depot's AV-8 aircraft maintenance professionals have spent a significant portion of their careers working on the Harrier. Aircraft Overhaul and Repair Supervisor Mike Stewart said it's hard to see the platform come to an end.

"I've been working on the AV-8 platform for the past 30 years," said Stewart. "It's the only platform I've ever known, dating back to the start of my career in the Marine Corps in 1994 to 2011, when I began working here at FRC East.

"With that, I know that every aircraft has its service life," Stewart continued. "We must evolve by improving our technology and tactics. F-35 is that new technology; it's how we keep up and move to the future. Although the AV-8 is a great aircraft, it has served its purpose. It's time to move on to the newer weapons platforms with more capabilities."

Jeff Broughton, business operations specialist, said the depot's Harrier team has an impressive track record, often working under budget and ahead of schedule. On average, the team completed AV-8B depot-level maintenance events nearly 10% faster than originally estimated, according to Broughton.

"Our goal is to stay within our customers' budgets and be good stewards of their funding," Broughton said. "We have met and exceeded that goal time and time again. Many of the aircraft we have worked on have been returned to the fleet earlier than originally planned and under our original cost estimates."

Broughton said during his 22 years on the AV-8B platform, he has witnessed many successes, with the most memorable being in 2015.

“One of our more outstanding inductions was an AV-8 that was damaged during the attack on Camp Bastion, Afghanistan,” said Broughton. “It was one of our fastest turnarounds for a special rework induction, and I think that was partially because we knew the circumstances and were highly motivated to get it back to the squadron. Not only did we return that aircraft nearly a week ahead of schedule, we also did it under the original estimate.

“We play an important role in warfighter readiness here at FRC East,” Broughton continued. “When something tragic like that happens, we come together and do whatever we can to help get the fleet back up and running.”

The AV-8 team’s reputation has set FRCE up to be the repair facility of choice for future squadrons, according to Broughton.

“For many years, we have established ourselves as being a successful and affordable option for the AV-8 community,” said Broughton. “We have established good rapport with our customers and local squadrons because they know we get the work done. They know we provide high-quality product within a good price range that is in-line with their funding.

“We continue to be good stewards of their funding and continue to provide this quality of work, so they continue to choose us,” Broughton continued. “As time goes on and platforms evolve, the way the AV-8 is transitioning to the F-35, we hope to remain their preferred depot source of repair.”

Broughton said working together has been a key factor in the team’s success.

“Our day-to-day plan is teamwork,” said Broughton. “We do everything we can to be role models to each other. Instead of just having one mentor or role model, we strive to all be a role model because a supervisor may be strong in one area, while the planner may be strong in another. We all come

together as one team, one fight, all strong.”

Ike Rettenmair, head of the AV-8 and F-35 branches at FRCE, said while the change in focus from the AV-8B Harrier to F-35 Lightning II is bittersweet, it represents an important step forward in the depot’s support of the warfighter.

“I was filled with mixed emotions the day we rolled the last Harrier out,” said Rettenmair. “I’ve supported the Harrier for 30 years in some capacity, starting with my time in the Marine Corps as an airframe mechanic. Throughout my time on the platform, I’ve had the privilege of meeting many remarkable individuals who possess a warrior mentality and take great pride in their service to the fleet. Even though this transition will be a big change for many of us, we remain proud and motivated in our support of the warfighter.”

FRCE is North Carolina’s largest maintenance, repair, overhaul and technical services provider, with more than 4,000 civilian, military and contract workers. Its annual revenue exceeds \$1 billion. The depot provides service to the fleet while functioning as an integral part of the greater U.S. Navy; Naval Air Systems Command; and Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers.