

Marine Corps Adds Cherry Point Squadron to F-35B Operators



A U.S. Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier assigned to Marine Attack Squadron 542 flies over Bodo, Norway during Fjord Fury, June 6, 2018. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Jailine L. Martinez*
ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corp is converting another AV-8B Harrier II attack squadron to F-35B Lightning II strike fighters, the first F-3B fleet squadron to be based on the East Coast.

Marine Attack Squadron 542 (VMA-542) – the Tigers – was re-designated Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 542 (VMFA-542) in ceremonies held at the squadron's base at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, as it retires its last Harriers in favor of the Lightning II. The squadron is scheduled to be operational with its F-35Bs by next summer.

VMA-542's last detachment of Harriers deployed to the Baltic Sea in 2022 on board USS Kearsarge and operated for a period from Estonia in during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

With the transition of VMFA-542, the only two AV-8B squadrons, VMA-223 and VMA-231, both based at Cherry Point, will remain flying in the Marine Corps. The last AV-8Bs are scheduled for retirement in fiscal 2027.

VMA-542 activated in March 1942 during World War as Marine Night Fighter Squadron 542 and flew its F6F-3N Hellcats in combat in the Pacific, including the Battle of Okinawa. In 1948, the squadron was re-designated Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 542 and was equipped with F7F-3N/4N Tigercat fighters, which the squadron flew in the Korean War. In 1951, the squadron returned to the United States for transition to

the F3D-2 Skyknight jet night fighter. In 1958 the squadron switched to the F4D-1 Skyray fighter.

In 1963, the squadron was redesignated VMFA-542 as it upgraded to the F-4B Phantom II. From July 15 until January 1970, the Tigers flew combat missions over Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. The squadron was de-activated on June 30, 1970, but re-activated on Jan. 12, 1972, as the second AV-8A Harrier squadron. In May 1986, the Tigers completed transition to the AV-8B Harrier II.

With the Harrier II, VMA-542 participated in combat operations such as Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Southwest Asia, Operation Noble Anvil in Kosovo, Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya, Operation Odyssey Lightning in Libya, Operation Inherent Resolve in Afghanistan, as well as deployments in support of multiple Marine Expeditionary Units, according to [1st Lt. Hudson Sadler](#) of the [2nd Marine Aircraft Wing](#).