

Marine Corps deactivates historic F/A-18 training squadron



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3rd Marine Aircraft Wing

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR, Calif. – The 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing deactivated VMFAT-101, an historic F/A-18 Hornet training squadron, here on September 29, 2023.

Since 1969, instructor pilots of the VMFAT-101 “Sharpshooters” have qualified combat aviators and sent them to operational squadrons worldwide.

The squadron commemorated the event by “flying the barn” – launching 18 aircraft in a single flight. More than 300 Marines, Sailors, veterans, family members, and community supporters then gathered for a sundown ceremony to commemorate the squadron’s history and contributions to Marine Corps readiness.

“Pilots come to VMFAT-101, cut their teeth, and are transformed into aviation warriors,” said Col. William J. Mitchell, commanding officer of MAG-11.

Since October 2019, VMFAT-101 has trained Navy and Marine Corps aviators as the only remaining F/A-18 Hornet Fleet Replacement Squadron in the Department of the Navy.

“Thousands of aircrew have passed through the halls of VMFAT-101 – fighter pilots, fighter radar intercept officers,

fighter weapon systems officers, and it's bigger than that," said Brig. Gen. Robert B. Brodie, Assistant Wing Commander of 3rd MAW. "This squadron has trained more maintenance Marines than any other in the Marine Corps. It's a holistic approach to ensure we are ready to fight and win."

The training mission of VMFAT-101 will transfer to the "Death Rattlers" of VMFA-323, a 3rd MAW operational squadron at MCAS Miramar. As outlined in the 2022 Marine Corps Aviation Plan, the Hornet will continue to operate and provide combat capability until its complete transition to the F-35 Lighting II in 2030.

Brodie is an F/A-18 pilot and served as commanding officer of VMFAT-101 from 2011 to 2013. He and Lt. Col. Ryan J. Franzen, the final commanding officer of VMFAT-101, were joined by ten former VMFAT-101 commanding officers and two spouses representing their late husbands.

"We're standing on the shoulders of giants," said Franzen. "You helped shape the 'Sharpshooter' legacy."