

Second Iwakuni-Based F-35B Squadron Achieves Full Operational Capability



A U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II aircraft with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 242 lands at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, in 2021 during a joint training evolution with Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force assets. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Tyler Harmon*

IWAKUNI, YAMAGUCHI, Japan – On May 17, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242 achieved full operational capability and is now ready to support the full complement of its missions, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing said May 19.

A significant part of this milestone is the establishment of 32 F-35B aircraft permanently forward-based as part of Marine Aircraft Group 12, ready to support a free and open Indo-Pacific. This transition occurred on schedule per the annual Marine Corps' aviation plan.

The F-35 Lightning II represents the future of Marine Corps tactical aviation and will eventually replace the AV-8B Harrier II and the F/A-18 Hornet in all units across the Marine Corps. On Oct. 16, 2020, VMFA-242, known as the "Bats," was re-designated as an F-35B squadron and, on Sept. 9, 2021, the squadron attained initial operational capability.

"The FOC milestone is the culmination of well over two years of planning and execution, all while being forward-deployed and in the face of a global pandemic. In my 20-plus years of service, I have never seen a unit come together in a way that our Marines and Sailors have while overcoming many challenges," said Lt. Col. Michael D. Wyrsh, the commanding officer of VMFA-242. "I am incredibly proud to say that I was a member of this team and I look forward to seeing where the

Bats' lasting culture of excellence will take them."

MAG-12 received the first forward-based F-35B squadron in January 2017 when VMFA-121 relocated to MCAS Iwakuni. With the addition of VMFA-242, MAG-12 is now the only forward-based unit in the Indo-Pacific with two permanently based F-35B squadrons.

"VMFA-242 has executed a masterful training plan and successfully accomplished the required elements necessary to declare FOC. This declaration provides added capability and capacity, enhances our posture, and ensures that we are able to effectively respond to any tasking," said Maj. Gen. Brian W. Cavanaugh, the commanding general of 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.