

U.S. - Australian Interchangeability: VMFA-214 Leaders fly RAAF F-35A



U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Robert Guyette, an F-35B Lightning II pilot and commanding officer of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 214, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, places an American flag and an Australian flag in the cockpit of a Royal Australian Air Force F-35A Lightning II aircraft assigned to RAAF No. 75 Squadron before a bilateral training flight at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory, Australia, June 20, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Nicholas Johnson)

By Cpl. Nicholas Johnson, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, July 8, 2024

TINDAL, NORTHERN TERRITORY, Australia – Northern Territory – In a demonstration of the ever-increasing interchangeability between U.S. Marine Corps and Royal Australian Air Force aviation, two F-35B Lightning II pilots with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 214, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, flew RAAF F-35A Lightning II aircraft, June 13, 2024.

“Interoperability is two different organizations figuring out ways to work together; interchangeability means the entire allied F-35 force can pool parts, maintainers, weapons, tactics – and now pilots and aircraft – to accomplish any mission,” said U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Robert Guyette, commanding officer of VMFA-214.

In May 2024, VMFA-214 deployed more than 200 Marines and eight F-35Bs from Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona, to RAAF Base Tindal, to conduct bilateral training with RAAF No. 3 Squadron and No. 75 Squadron and participate in the RAAF led

exercise Diamond Storm. This training iteration enhanced each air wings' "fight together" mindset.

Guyette and Maj. John Rose, executive officer of VMFA-214, took part in the bilateral training. The pilots flew RAAF F-35A jets alongside RAAF and USMC pilots in their respective platforms.

"Our formations are completely blended, and our pilots pull the same lessons learned from this incredibly realistic training," Guyette said. "When the XO and I flew in the RAAF F-35As, we spent zero time briefing procedural differences in execution, because we have been adhering to the same standards as the RAAF from day one."

Guyette flew alongside his counterpart, Wing Commander Andrew Nilson, commanding officer of No. 75 Squadron.

"The most impressive aspect of the exercise has been the depth of interoperability and interchangeability between our two nations," Nilson said. "It was a further demonstration of our cooperation that Marine Corps pilots were able to fly RAAF F-35A aircraft during the exercise, allowing the RAAF to share and learn tactics, techniques and procedures at a level of complexity that has truly tested the F-35's capability."

Incorporating two aircraft variants, pilots and maintainers from both teams introduced additional planning complexities at every organizational level.

"The mission planning factors for each event are very challenging, realistic, and relevant for high end conflict against the peer adversary," Rose said.

Such integration was made possible through previous training exercises between VMFA-214 and RAAF F-35 squadrons. VMFA-214 has trained directly with all three RAAF F-35 squadrons over the past year, building on the tactical, technical and personal coordination between the two aviation forces.

“This ‘fight together’ mindset has also been enhanced by the personal relationships established between the Marine Corps and the RAAF,” Rose said. “VMFA-214 and RAAF No. 75 squadron were on the same tactical page from day one.”

VMFA-214’s transpacific deployment was preceded by a similar one executed by Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 314, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd MAW, in the summer of 2023. VMFA-314, an F-35C Lightning II squadron from MCAS Miramar, deployed four F-35C aircraft across the Pacific to RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales, and trained alongside RAAF No. 3 Squadron.

“VMFA-314’s detachment to Australia last year provided a winning template and really did an excellent job of setting the proper conditions for VMFA-214 to be successful this year,” Rose said. “They passed on lessons learned, which VMFA-214 leveraged to efficiently deploy the squadron from MCAS Yuma across the Pacific to RAAF Base Tindal, Australia.”

After reviewing VMFA-314’s deployment, VMFA-214 was prepared to deploy an additional four jets this year, expanding the latitude of training options for both Marines and the RAAF. Beyond professional growth, the Marines of VMFA-214 forged personal connections and friendships with RAAF aviators during the deployment.

“I have some long-time friendships within the RAAF that go back to my first Marine Corps fleet tour,” Rose said. “It has been such a cool experience to see my old Australian friends and get the opportunity to fly in such high-level events with them.”

□VMFA-214’s deployment honed combat readiness and strengthened enduring friendships that underscore the U.S.-Australia military alliance. Marine Corps and RAAF aviators will continue to “train together, fight together,” preparing for any challenge to the Indo-Pacific region.