

MEDIA RELEASE
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Corps' first operational F-35B takes to Yuma skies

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION YUMA, ARIZ. (February 21, 2013) Blue skies welcomed the Marine Corp's first operational F-35B Lightning II flight at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz. Feb. 21.

BF-20, flown by Maj. Aric Liberman, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 Maintenance Officer and native of Washington D.C., conducted the squadron's first orientation flight at 2:54 p.m. MST.

"Today's flight is an important milestone for the squadron and for MAG-13," stated Marine Aircraft Group 13 Commanding Officer, Col. Michael Gough. "It signifies the beginning of a new era of flight operations for the Marine Corps. The F-35B is a remarkable aircraft, and today's first flight went flawlessly. We are looking forward to a very busy spring and summer as we ramp up capability here in Yuma and train our Marines for the future."

As the squadron expands its operations and end strength, they will continue revolutionizing expeditionary Marine air-ground combat power in all threat environments through the use of MCAS Yuma training ranges in Arizona and California. VMFA-121 will be home to

approximately 300 Marines and is expected to receive additional F-35s throughout the next 8 to 12 months, with a total of 16 aircraft scheduled to arrive by late 2013.

Commanding Officer of VMFA-121, LtCol. Jeffrey Scott, native of San Jose, Calif. and formerly an AV-8B Harrier pilot, is pleased to see the teamwork and skills displayed today by the men and women of VMFA-121 and the supporting staff of MCAS Yuma.

"This flight was another important and successful milestone in the F-35 program and for the Green Knights of VMFA-121 as we continue to build capability in the squadron and in the Marine Corps," stated Scott. "This flight not only marks the first local flight of the F-35B in Yuma, it marks the first time a flight was conducted with the Marine Corps, or any service branch, primarily responsible for the maintenance of the aircraft. The success of the flight is a tribute to the Marines of this squadron, their tremendous work getting to this point and to the field training detachment as well as the support from our higher headquarters at MAG-13, 3rd MAW and Headquarters Marine Corps. I have confidence our Marines will continue to uphold the legacy of both the squadron and the Marine Corps as we continue to build our capabilities in operating and maintaining this amazing airplane."

Differently from previous fixed wing capabilities across the Department of Defense, the integration of U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps and coalition F-35 Lightning II aircraft on a common platform will provide the dominant, multi-role, fifth generation capabilities needed across the full spectrum of combat operations to deter potential adversaries and enable future aviation power projection. Specific to the Marine Corps, consolidating three aircraft, the AV-8B Harrier, the F/A-18 Hornet and the EA-6B, into one is central to maintaining tactical aviation affordability and serving as good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

VMFA-121 will continue to set the pace for the F-35 program based on a common platform. The U.S. Air Force and Navy can now integrate best practices from VMFA-121 in preparation for the future operational basing of the F-35A and F-35C scheduled for 2013.

Imagery Cutlines:

** Media Notes: Additional photos and video from today's first flight can be found at: www.dvidshub.net/mcasy.
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1. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 conducted its first operational F-35B Lightning II flight at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., Feb. 21, 2013. "This flight not only marks the first local flight of the F-35B in Yuma, it marks the first time a flight was conducted with the Marine Corps, or any service branch, primarily responsible for the maintenance of the aircraft," said Lt. Col. Jeffrey Scott, VMFA-121 commanding officer and a native of San Jose, Calif. "The success of the flight is a tribute the Marines of this squadron, their tremendous work getting to this point and to the field training detachment as well as the support from our higher headquarters at MAG-13, 3rd MAW and Headquarters Marine Corps." (photo by Lance Cpl. Uriel Avendano)

2. An F-35B Lightning II from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 takes off from Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz. launching the squadron's first orientation flight, Feb. 21, 2013. BF-20, piloted by Maj. Aric Liberman, VMFA-121 Maintenance Officer, marked an important milestone in the evolution of the aircraft. "It signifies the beginning of a new era of flight operations for the Marine Corps," said Col. Michael Gough, the Marine Aircraft Group 13 Commanding Officer. "We are looking forward to a very busy spring and summer as we ramp up capability here in Yuma and train our Marines for the future." (photo by Cpl. Bill Waterstreet)