

**Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps**

**Remarks at VMFA-121 Redesignation Ceremony (Yuma, AZ)**

**(Remarks as prepared)**

**General James F. Amos,**

**Commandant**

**United States Marine Corps**

**20 November 2012**

Thanks, Bob for those remarks. Senator McCain, Governor Brewer, thank you both for being here and for your remarks. I'm mindful of your schedules, the daily demands on your time, and thus we all appreciate your efforts to be here and show your support for this significant occasion. Thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you...all of you, for being here today. To my Marines, Sailors, and our families, thanks for what you do for our Corps and our Nation each and every day. Lastly, to the Green Knights of VMFA-121, tighten down your harnesses and strap yourselves in real tight, the ride of a lifetime is about to begin!!!

Today is an historic day for our Corps as we mark yet another milestone in the development of the F-35. The Marines you see before you are on the cutting edge of aviation history.

This squadron will be the first, not only in the Marine Corps or the United States, but the first in the WORLD to bring a 5th Generation, multi-role, STOVL stealth fighter, and its unique and highly advanced capabilities, into an operational status.

For the first time in aviation history, the most lethal fighter characteristics, supersonic speed, radar-evading stealth, extreme agility, short takeoff/vertical landing capability, and an impressive array of 21<sup>st</sup> Century weapons have been combined in a single platform... the F-35B Lightning II you see behind me. It's innovation like that represented here today, which has kept Marine Aviation ready and relevant for the last 100 years.

The F-35B is the future of Marine tactical fixed wing aviation. As many of you know, today the F-35 begins replacing three models of tactical jets the Marine Corps currently operates. In fact, VMFA(AW)-121 gave up their F/A-18D Hornets just a short three months ago after returning from a highly successful WESTPAC deployment. The F-35 will replace our Hornets, our AV-8B Harrier attack aircraft and our EA-6B electronic warfare aircraft.

Replacing so many different platforms with a single, multi-capable aircraft represents a new way of operating and thinking. This jet possesses "eye-watering" capabilities. The things it can do are most impressive to a couple of old F-4 Phantom guys like General John Hudson... and myself. Unfortunately, I can't talk about most of those capabilities here!! But, suffice it to say this is not your father's fighter!

VMFA-121 is at the forefront of one of the most significant transition periods in the 100-year history of Marine Aviation, as we replace nearly every aircraft in the Corps between 2005 and 2025. Certainly, it is the most significant transition in quite some time, maybe since the introduction of the helicopter to our forces in the post World War II 1940s. But, being on the forefront is not new to this squadron, the "Green Knights" have been a storied squadron since they were established just months before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Activated on 24 June 1941 at Quantico, Virginia, 121 was immediately involved in the Allied offensive in the South Pacific beginning in August 1942. Quickly becoming an integral part of the Cactus Air Force at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, one of our Corps most iconic battles some 70 years ago the Marines of Fighter Squadron-121 quickly established themselves in the fight over Guadalcanal. Under the leadership of Major Leonard Davis and Captain Joe Foss, they completed three tours in the Solomon Islands flying their F-4F Wildcats eventually

downing 165 Japanese aircraft. 121 later flew another combat tour at Peleliu in F-4U Corsairs, adding another 44 aerial victories to an already impressive record which included 14 fighter aces.

In the years since World War II, this squadron, one of the longest serving in our Corps, transitioned through several different aircraft types. Among them the F8F Bearcat...the A-1 Skyraider... the F9F Cougar... the venerable A-4 Skyhawk... the same aircraft Senator McCain flew...and the A-6 Intruder...prior to receiving the first F/A-18D Hornets in 1989, adding to their legacy each time.

The legacy of this squadron is indeed long and distinguished, having deployed in support of every major combat operation this Nation has been involved in since 1941... the Pacific... Korea in 1951... Vietnam in 1966... Operation Desert Storm in 1991... Southern Watch in 2000... Enduring Freedom in 2002, and Iraqi Freedom in 2003. The squadron also completed multiple deployments to the Western Pacific as part of the Marine Corps' Unit Deployment Program, returning most recently in August of this year. As you can see, this squadron has been on the forefront for quite some time, and I believe they are worthy of the challenge we now place before them.

The Marines and Sailors of 121 will continue a program that has made great strides in the last several years. From the early challenges of the F-35 program, and more specifically arguments against the fielding of our B model, this program has arrived here today with a growing string of notable successes and significant momentum. In fighter pilot parlance, we call that kinetic and potential energy!!

I noted earlier that having F-35Bs in Yuma shows tangible progress in this vitally important aircraft program. There is additional progress all over our Corps today regarding fielding the F35B. I call your attention to the 7 F-35Bs currently at NAS Patuxent River, Maryland, conducting flight test activities, the 11 F-35Bs now at our training squadron, VMFAT-501, at Eglin AFB, Florida and the 2 United Kingdom F-35Bs that have joined 501 and have also begun training there. We are making strides in every aspect of this program. Aircraft are being produced tested and flown, pilots are being trained in the air and in the simulators and aircraft mechanics and technicians are learning to ply their trade on this magnificent jet. Yuma will eventually have five operational squadrons, and be responsible for operational evaluation of the F35B. MCAS Yuma will continue to be a busy base.

While there are many fathers of success, I want to be clear to all present today, we would not be here celebrating the many achievements of the Lightning II program were it not for the persistently responsible oversight and unyielding support of Congress. The Senate and House have seen fit to stand beside the services through some very tough times, as we have developed, and now fielded, the airplane you see before you today. Senator McCain...fellow members of Congress...thank you for your leadership and fidelity.

Beyond Congress, the progress seen is largely due to the professionalism and dedication of the Joint Government and Industry team associated with the F-35. From our Navy, Air Force, and Allied partners, represented by the Joint Program Office to our Industry team under the leadership of Mr Bob Stevens of Lockheed Martin, and their countless suppliers and sub-contractors, the progress is visible everywhere and is mainly due to a group of highly skilled and

dedicated professionals that have refused to allow this aircraft program to fail. The enthusiasm and sense of optimism is infectious.

I want to close by speaking directly to the Marines of VMFA-121. Marines... the eyes of the world are upon you. I know that everyone one of you are up to the challenge of making this aircraft successful, relevant and operational. We will take things slow. We will do things the right way and in the end, you will deliver to our nation its very first 5th generation, operational COMBAT SQUADRON. It will exist for one purpose only...to defend America and its interests.

LtCol Scott, our very first fleet JSF Squadron Skipper, we all envy your position. You're taking command at an important point in history. I'm sure you appreciate the significance of this moment. This is what you've trained your entire career to do. There will be challenging times ahead, but you're up to the task. Lead your Marines well.

Ladies and Gentlemen...again...thank you all for being here today. God Bless the Marine Corps and Semper Fidelis.

*1307 words ~ 9 minutes*