

Marine Corps F-35Bs Trained With A U.S. F-117 Nighthawk At MCAS Miramar



One F-117 and two F-35Bs recover to MCAS Miramar. (Image credit: @point_mugu_skies)

The U.S. Marine Corps F-35B STOVL (Short Take Off Vertical Landing) jets jointly operated with an F-117 Nighthawk from Tonopah Test Range.

On Feb. 8, 2022, the news started circulating online about at least one F-117 Nighthawk working the pattern at MCAS (Marine Corps Air Station) Miramar, California. The sighting immediately brought to mind the somewhat surprising deployment two F-117s did in 2020 to Miramar as well as the one to Fresno last year.

While the activities carried out from the base just outside San Diego in 2020 have never been publicly acknowledged and little is known other than the aircraft landed at MCAS Miramar in the afternoon on Oct. 20, 2020, and departed two days later, on Oct. 22, returning directly to Tonopah Test Range after a mission offshore in the W291 range off Southern California, the deployment to Fresno got at least an official confirmation.

As we reported back then, at the end of Sept. 2021, two F-117s, flying as KNIGHT01, arrived at Fresno Yosemite International Airport to carry out dissimilar air combat training with the local-based California Air National Guard F-15C/D Eagles. Several shots and clips, taken by aviation photographers showed the iconic “Wobblin Goblin” at work over central California and the 144th FW posted a video of the Nighthawk operating at Fresno on their FB page too. But, some interesting details were provided, along with the first official images of Nighthawk aircraft flying again after being retired in 2008, by a USAF’s public release.

Fortunately, local photographers were outside MCAS Miramar for the 2022 deployment, getting some really cool shots of the F-117 deployed there last week.

“It was a very similar pattern to when the Nighthawks visited Fresno. I was also there for that one,” told us our friend and local photographer @point_mugu_skies. “This Nighthawk arrived Monday afternoon.....did a quick morning flight on Tuesday and then nothing the rest of the day (maybe a night flight) then a flight at 11: 30am roughly on Wednesday, then an early flight on Thursday at 7: 45am or so. He left back to Tonopah on Friday around 11AM”.

The interesting thing is that the aircraft this time integrated with the F-35Bs of the Marine fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 225 “Vikings” of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 13, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, U.S. Marine Corps, deployed to MCAS Miramar from MCAS Yuma.

“Wednesday and Thursday it returned to base in a flight of 3....two different F-35s each day. Same squadron. Wind direction reversed runways on Thursday which is how I got that unique angle. My son and I were the only spotters there on Thursday so we were the only ones that got that shot.”

In fact, the shots they took are pretty unique and were also used by the “Vikings” in a post on FB:

“The Vikings just completed a two-week long detachment to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in support of Exercise Winter Fury. Bringing forces together from across 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, the exercise provided an opportunity for VMFA-225 to forward deploy and integrate in anti-air warfare missions with squadrons from across our sister services as well as from allied nations.”

Again, it’s nice to see the F-117 still being valuable in the DACT training with front line squadrons. In this case, the unit is the latest USMC squadron to receive the F-35B: its first flight with the new aircraft at their homebase took place on Sept. 25, 2021. The “Vikings” are scheduled to gain the IOC (Initial Operational Capability) this year. It’s also remarkable to see different stealth generations integrating in training activities.

As explained in various articles, while some of the F-117s that were retired in 2008 and initially kept in a “Type 1000” storage at Tonopah Test Range have now been disassembled and transferred to museums around the U.S., F-117s have continued to fly over Nevada and California. We have reported sightings in 2018, in 2019 and also 2020. After all, the F-117s are not completely retired, quite the contrary.

As of January 2021, the U.S. Air Force had 48 F-117s remaining in its inventory. The service is disposing approximately four aircraft each year, meaning that about 44 should be still available. Along with flying the adversary stealth role taking also part in Red Flag missions or deploying to airbases across the U.S. as reported, the Nighthawks are most probably also supporting the development and testing of stealth or counter-stealth technologies and tactics, as some photographs showing at least one airframe sporting a mirror-like coating similar to the one applied to an F-22 and to an F-35 seems to suggest.

The Stealth Jet is (not) dead. Long live the Stealth Jet!

A big Thank You to @point_mugu_skies for allowing us to use the photos you can find in this article (after sending us the shots of the secretive RQ-170 Sentinel we talked about here). Make sure you follow them on Instagram!



David Cenciotti is a freelance journalist based in Rome, Italy. He is the Founder and Editor of “The Aviationist”, one of the world’s most famous and read military aviation blogs. Since 1996, he has written for major worldwide magazines, including Air Forces Monthly, Combat Aircraft, and many others, covering aviation, defense, war, industry, intelligence, crime and cyberwar. He has reported from the U.S., Europe, Australia and Syria, and flown several combat planes with different air forces. He is a former 2nd Lt. of the Italian Air Force, a private pilot and a graduate in Computer Engineering. He has written five books and contributed to many more ones.

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