

BONEYARD BIRDS

THE "BONEYARD" AT DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE IN TUCSON, ARIZONA, IS HOME TO AMERICA'S RETIRED MILITARY AIRCRAFT – THOUGH THE USAF WOULD VERY MUCH PREFER YOU CALL IT THE AEROSPACE MAINTENANCE AND REGENERATION GROUP (AMARG). COVERING 2600 ACRES, AMARG MAINTAINS APPROXIMATELY 3200 AIRCRAFT IN VARIOUS STATES OF CONDITION BUT, IN REALITY, IT WILL BE THE END OF THE ROAD FOR MOST OF THEM. WE PRESENT A VARIETY OF AIRCRAFT PRIOR TO THEM BEING FLOWN TO AMARG AND DURING THEIR SERVICE CAREER, WITH EXAMPLES OF USAF, USN, AND USMC AIRCRAFT INCLUDED. DUE TO BUREAUCRATIC DECISIONS, TAXPAYERS ARE NO LONGER ALLOWED TO VISIT AMARG BUT THESE IMAGES ILLUSTRATE SOME OF OUR NATIONAL ASSETS SERVING A FINAL TOUR IN THE ARIZONA DESERT

BY JIM DUNN

Now referred to as the "Legacy Hornet," the F/A-18C/D remains in frontline service with the Marines thanks to the very low acquisition rate the Navy has maintained in acquiring the F-35B/C for them. That acquisition rate is even worse for the Navy itself when it comes to getting the F-35C for their carrier squadrons. The final frontline Navy squadron to operate the Legacy Hornet was the "Blue Blasters" of VFA-34, who completed their last cruise with CVW-2 aboard the USS *Carl Vinson* in the summer of 2018 before converting to the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet. The next to last CAG-bird for VFA-34 was F/A-18C 165217 seen returning to NAS Fallon on 14 May 2014. After spending a last tour with the Marines in VMFA-323, it joined the current roster of 111 F/A-18Cs in storage on 1 February 2023.



Photographed at NAS North Island on 2 February 2011 was AV-8B Harrier BuNo 165421 that carried the name of USMC Maj. Gregory "Pappy" Boyington on its canopy rail. Representing Boyington's famous World War II "Black Sheep" of VMF-214, AV-8B 165421 was retired from VMA-214 on 10 June 2021. There are 20 Harriers at AMARG as the Marine Corps replaces them with the F-35B Lightning II, and the Black Sheep are now designated VMFA-214.



What in more enlightened times would have been a very popular Warbird like the T-6/SNJ Texan, the Beechcraft T-34C Turbo-Mentor will not get the opportunity to fulfill that role. Instead of also bringing a nice return to taxpayers on their investment, the T-34C will be consigned to a dusty retirement under the hot Arizona sun. More than likely, most will be converted to scrap since neither the military nor Beech wants these aircraft in civilian hands. While a few continue to serve the Navy, currently there are 166 Turbo-Mentors in storage at AMARG. One of those that did receive a moment of fame is T-34C 161841 that was chosen to be given a heritage paint scheme for the 100th Anniversary of Naval Aviation in 2011. Retired on 14 August 2015 from service with the "Rangers" of VT-28, T-34C 161841 is seen here at the large celebration on Naval Aviation at NAS North Island on February 2, 2011.



It is customary in many Navy and Marine Corps aviation squadrons to designate one aircraft to be painted in the squadron colors, and have it assigned to the Commander Air Group (or CAG). Known as CAG-birds, these colorful aircraft are a source of pride for the squadron, as well as becoming favorites for aviation enthusiasts in a world of dull gray military aircraft. The Grumman EA-6B Prowler seemed to be made for this colorful tradition. Awaiting its crew on the ramp at NAS Fallon during an air wing deployment on 28 July 2009, EA-6B BuNo 163032 is the CAG-bird for the "Zappers" of VAQ-130 assigned to CVW-3 off the USS *Harry S. Truman*. The Prowlers are now a part of history, replaced by the EA-18G Growler, with EA-6B 163032 entering retirement at AMARG on 4 December 2018 where it is one of 36 now in storage.